

Body Alchemy

TRANSSEXUAL PORTRAITS



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BY LOREN CAMERON



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To the brave people in these photographs
and for the thousands of people who are like them.

Philosophical alchemy is the art of transforming what stands in misery, conflict, fixation, and confusion (the prime matter or *prima materia*) and allowing it to come to presence freely and completely as itself (the ultimate matter or *ultima materia*).... Transformation is the art of allowing our essential nature, as body-mind-spirit, to manifest completely and freely without conflict and fixation. It is the art of freeing the whole person, body and all. It is not the willful attempt to change who and what we are, but the art of becoming who we are.

– Jeffrey Maitland

Introduction

My affinity for photography began as early as I can remember. My parents had lots of photo books with pictures of The War and pre-World War Two America. There, I first saw images by Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, who greatly influenced my artistic and aesthetic sensibilities. My father had stories of his own about what it was like to grow up in Iowa near the end of the Great Depression; he and his siblings would scour the railroad tracks to find bits of coal that had fallen from the trains' coal cars, and he quit school at thirteen so he could work to feed his family. Through Lange's photographs, I gained a visual understanding of my father's stories about working-class survival. Her images touched me deeply and helped me understand his tough attitude about living and his generation's no-nonsense work ethic, as well as the universality of the human condition of pain, strife and the will to persevere.

I've looked to these images from the past to learn something of compassion and a sense of the heroic. In my own life, along with my father's words, they have taught me to honor labor and to keep putting one foot in front of the other. Being drawn to photography as a medium of expression seems only natural for me, given the emotional impact it has had on my life. It has been the most powerful teaching tool for me to date, and I feel the message in my work isn't very different from Lange's or Evans': it is a vision about strength and will and everyday people.

As a tomboy as a child, I shunned dresses and rolling down my socks. I loved playing Army games, and my favorite doll was a G.I. Joe. When my mother died in 1968, I moved from Pasadena, California to rural Arkansas to live with my father, his wife and her two teenage children. I didn't see my three sisters again until I was nearly twenty.

My father's farm was just outside a small rural town of thirteen hundred people at the foot of the Ozark Mountains. He raised horses for the love of them and was employed at the nearby nuclear plant. A lot of my adolescence and early teens

were spent working with my father, building fences and feeding the horses. In my spare time after school, I explored the lush and wild countryside with my small pack of canine companions. Many afternoons were lazed-away on the bank of a pond while I fished for perch and daydreamed.

At the onset of puberty, that slightly insane time in all our lives, I grew very restless and became a regular fixture down at the local greasy spoon in town. I dressed in overalls and workboots and learned to swear like a trucker and smoke cigarettes and marijuana. I loved anything daring and adventurous. My friends and I rafted swollen rivers, drag-raced, rode crazy horses and ran from cops.

During my teens and even before then, I had begun to feel terrifically uncomfortable as a female-bodied person. When I was twelve years old, I heard of people changing sex, and I even wrote away for information. But who could I tell? Who would understand what even I could barely verbalize? I could only wear baggy clothing to hide my ever-developing breasts and somehow learn to cope with the inconvenience of menstruation. At about seventeen, I had barely begun to experiment sexually with boys when one of my older female friends returned home on leave from the Army. As we took a pleasant drive down a dirt road, she very carefully inquired about whether I had ever considered being a lesbian. The thought hadn't even occurred to me. I was elated at the suggestion! Why not? If I couldn't be a boy, then I could be a dyke! Come to think of it, women were very attractive!

Unfortunately, my excitement wasn't shared by my heterosexual friends. Like greased lightning, the news of my new-found identity got around town. It took even less time for all of my friends to turn their backs on me. I was in my junior year of high school where I had been unexpectedly elected class president and student council president. All of a sudden, I was outcast.

Finding no support or solace, I quit school and ran away

from home. I spent the next couple of years struggling to survive and taking long bus rides across the States, trying to see the world beyond that small place. Working labor jobs—fruit picking and construction clean-up—I barely got by. I returned to Arkansas, not having found the place to call home, and worked until I felt the urge to buy the next bus ticket. I ran a truckstop fuel station for a while, then I got a job on a youth conservation-corps crew. One day, while I was mixing cement for a rock wall we were building, these two very lesbian-looking women approached from a nearby campground. They were from San Francisco. Within a few hours of friendly conversation, these seemingly sophisticated dykes convinced me that my fame and fortune were to be found in a city by the ocean. Weeks later, I purchased my last bus ticket, grabbed my duffel bag and went out West.

I had lived in the San Francisco lesbian scene for nine years, when at twenty-six, I finally began to address my discomfort about my gender. I can only speculate about the timing. Maybe it was because I was finally living by myself and didn't have to contend with any negative peer pressure, or maybe I was finally old enough to deal with it. Other things had changed too. I had quit smoking pot and tobacco, which I suspect had, until then, suppressed my feelings. In addition, I was recovering from the failure of a very passionate relationship that had left me devastated. For the first time in my life, I wasn't numb.

The need to change became all-consuming: I started the step-by-step process of therapy, doctors and surgeons. Taking testosterone as hormone therapy and developing a body-building regimen, I ever so slowly and painfully began to reinvent myself. I photographed myself and sent amateur snapshots to friends and family in order to show them how happy I was; I wanted them to get used to the idea of my body being different. If they could see my new beard and chest sans breasts, perhaps it would be easier for them to accept my new identity. You know, so they would stop calling me "she." I was excited, too, much like when I had discovered my sexuality as a teenager. Only this time, I refused to feel any shame. I was creating a beautiful new body image, and I was proud of it.

What was initially a crude documentation of my own personal journey gradually evolved into an impassioned mission. Impulsively, I began to photograph other transsexuals that I knew, feeling compelled to make images of their emotional and physical triumphs. I was fueled by my need to be validated and wanted, in turn, to validate them. I wanted the world to see us, I mean, really see us.

Since I'd had no formal training, I took a basic photography class and learned to print my images. My first work was done with a simple Pentax K1000. Within a year, I managed to have my first show, which earned critical attention. After several more exhibitions, I graduated from thirty-five millimeter to medium format. Still preferring the simplicity of a manually operated camera, I bought a used Pentax six-by-seven body and a new one thirty-five macro lens. Finding the rectangular negative more appealing than the shape of a two-and-one-quarter inch square, I decided to continue using a field camera. Besides, this Pentax was as durable as a tank: I could drop it and still be in the running. Transitioning to a larger negative helped me regard myself more seriously as a professional photographer, and the crisp, beautiful quality of the photographs inspired new images.

Despite the financial challenge, The Work has taken on a life of its own, and I am pressed to keep producing. I use a shutter-release bulb in my self-portraits because I usually work alone; my camera doesn't have a shutter timer, so I have to press the shutter button myself. I actually prefer this method to ensure that the work is entirely of my own vision. People have asked me, however, why I don't try to conceal the bulb in the photographs. At times, given the composition of a photograph, concealing the bulb may not be possible. I also feel a certain pride in making a decent image without seeing through the lens, so I don't really mind that the bulb is visible. Its presence serves as a metaphor: I am creating my own image alone, an act that reflects the transsexual experience as well.

For the longest time, transsexuals and especially transsexual men (female-to-males) have been virtually invisible to the dominant culture. Marginalized even within

the gay and lesbian subculture, transsexuals have occupied no real space of our own. In the last decade or so, more and more transsexual people have been speaking out about our experiences. We are beginning to represent ourselves for the first time and to develop our own voice. *Body Alchemy* is the first photodocumentation of transsexual men from within our community.

12 **A**s I have observed another movement paralleling that of transsexuals, it is my intention to embrace and include in this work those people who may identify more comfortably as "transgender," or "gender transgressive." A growing number of people are and have been questioning the more usual representations of gender. Some have had chemical and surgical enhancement, and many have not. Inhabiting a less static gender identification than that of typical transsexuals, they are exploring and experiencing a fluid range of gender embodiment. My own intimate partner, Kayt, is one such individual. Ironically, it has been through knowing and loving her that I have gained an even deeper understanding of the mutable soul. Her flexible consciousness has encouraged me to be generous in my thinking and less rigid about the way others self-define, or in fact, when they choose not to.

In an effort to address these issues, I have produced a very personal project with Kayt. Along with my photo essay and its symbolic representations of the two of us, I have invited Kayt to write about her experience of being transgendered and about our sometimes conventional, sometimes unconventional relationship. We hope that this inclusion will offer yet another perspective on what it means to be transgendered.

Loren Cameron
May 1996



Self-Portraits



Carney

Every time I tell someone I am a transsexual, I have a turbulent series of emotions. At first, I am afraid that whomever I'm telling will have a negative response, that they will somehow be repelled and become hostile or in some way reject me. As I begin to speak, my heartbeat races a little, and I feel my face flush with the heat of embarrassment. I might even stammer as the words fall out of my mouth, failing to conceal my nervousness. My stomach tightens in anticipation.

But then, if I've been given a positive reception, I begin to spill it all with myopic enthusiasm, answering every question, which always encourages another. People are naturally curious, and some have a real need to know. By revealing myself, I have consensually invited their voyeurism; they can't help but watch as I make a spectacle of myself. Their attention and acceptance fuels my eagerness to tell: I feel unique in my own way. My unconscious self-absorption, however, leads me to compulsive indiscretions, and I easily disclose everything that is personal. To confide in them is both alluring and enchanting.

In the end, when I have spilled my guts or exhausted their interest, I begin to retreat a little. A grayness falls over me, and I realize that I feel unsafe. I feel naked. Self-doubt starts to poke holes in my ego, and I begin to think I have exploited myself: I am ashamed of my exhibitionism. I promise myself not to tell anyone ever again.

De Profundis

I'll never forget my first photo exhibition. I stood for hours on a cold and windy sidewalk and leafleted passersby. It seemed an effective way to draw people into the gallery, especially those who hadn't read about the show in the local papers. On the handbills, I had printed nude portraits of myself and another transsexual. They were provocative images and good examples of my work, but being so revealed placed me in a vulnerable position that was more than a little scary. I had strategically located myself in the gay and lesbian part of the city, where I felt most secure, in hope of finding a supportive public. After a little while, working the crowded street, I realized that it wasn't as safe a place as I had thought. While many people were receptive, there were nearly as many who were indifferent or actively hostile. I remember feeling shock as a man turned on me, crushing the flier into my hand while telling me how repulsive I was. Over and over, I watched as people laughed out loud or joked about our transsexual bodies. One woman, glancing at the piece of paper, actually sneered at me and flung it away from her. I was devastated. I endured it as long as I could, and then I retreated, feeling very alone. At home in my bed, still hearing their laughter and seeing their leering faces, I pulled the covers over me. I tried to push away their memory and the terrible feelings of shame, but my thoughts turned dark and full of anger. I despaired of ever belonging.





Heroes

The first time transsexual men marched in the San Francisco Gay Pride Parade in 1994, I had an incredible day. Holding one end of a banner that read *FTM TRANS PRIDE*, I walked bare-chested with my head held high. It was a frightening experience: just a handful of us braved the hordes with literally hundreds of thousands of people scrutinizing us. We were all nervous, and I remember whispering repeatedly to my banner mate to slow his pace because I wanted to absorb it all and fix the moment in my mind forever. I wanted to watch people's reactions to us, and more than anything, I wanted to walk with dignity.

As we passed, a silence fell over the crowd until we heard a timid offering of applause, occasionally punctuated with an outbreak of cheers. I glanced at my comrades to see their broad smiles when we heard hoorahs. Every now and then, I glimpsed in the crowd a face full of contempt for us or saw an acquaintance who pretended not to see me wave. I felt a disturbing jumble of sadness and angry defiance; I forced myself to look into their eyes until they turned away.

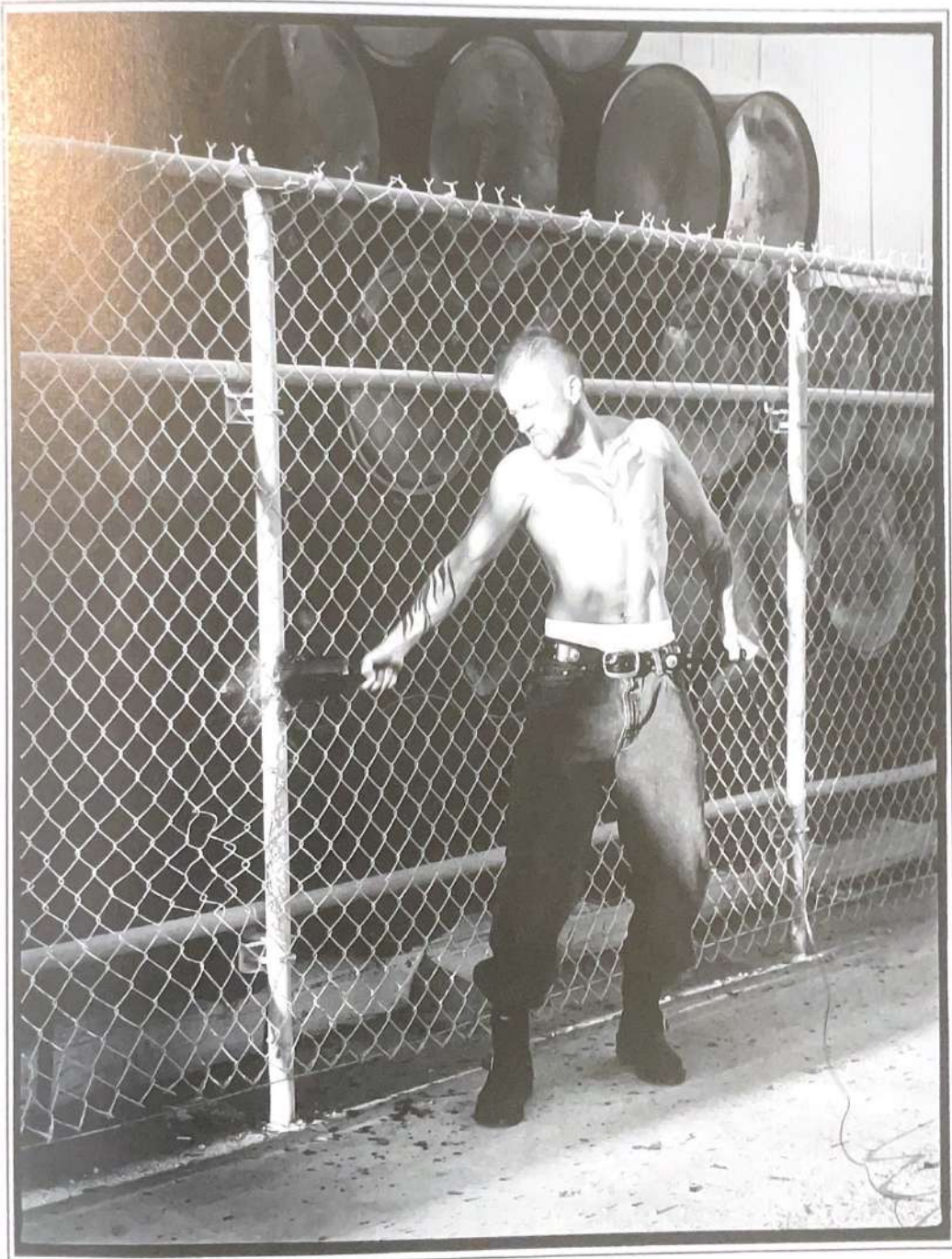
Whether she or he has marched in a parade or not, I think every transsexual understands what we felt that day. Each one of us has had to take a stand about our identity. When I photograph transsexuals, men or women, I ask about their histories. I know they have labored to arrive at the place where I've found them. They tell me about losing jobs and friends while going through transition, and how they fought to keep them. They talk about the people who love them and how difficult it is to make them understand. I see the strain in their faces as they speak to me, and I know they've been through so much. But more than anything, I hear the relief in their voices. Satisfied with their changed bodies, they each tell me how much better they feel, and that they would do it all again if they had to. I marvel at their strength: like tempered steel, it is the kind that propels armies and liberationists, a single-minded conviction. When I look through my lens at them, I recognize the power of such willfulness. I want the world to know the force of their beauty.

Testosterone

I inject myself with a dose of testosterone every two weeks, the standard maintenance schedule for men like me. Between injections, the oil-based drug absorbs slowly through the muscle tissue. I admit I've become very attached to taking the hormone, which is responsible for all my physical masculine attributes, like my facial and body hair and muscle development. I've also noticed that it affects my sex drive and emotional state too. During the peak part of my cycle, I turn into a randy, greasy kind of guy who is more than a little irritable.

Learning to manage the emotional and physical effects of testosterone hasn't been easy. There are moments when I don't do well at all. I've had many regrettable fights with my partner that could have been avoided had it not been for the rapid escalation of my temper. It's hard to describe the way it makes me compulsively react to situations. Once, I actually slugged a man on the street for verbally assaulting a woman. The anger I felt was swift and instinctual. My brain didn't have a second to consider the consequences before my fist was flying. Luckily, the man wasn't really hurt, and being a weenie, he just went away. What if he hadn't?

I have found that people in the body-building community are the most familiar with this kind of chemically induced behavior. They call it "Roid Rage." Fortunately, my occasional meltdowns are mild in comparison to what competitive athletes experience. Learning to recognize when I feel unusually agitated helps me get a grip and so does a good workout at the gym. Discontinuing the testosterone isn't really an option since so much of my identity hinges on it. Maybe, over time, medical science will find a more efficient way to administer this drug for transsexuals. Until then, it's a great lesson in self-control.



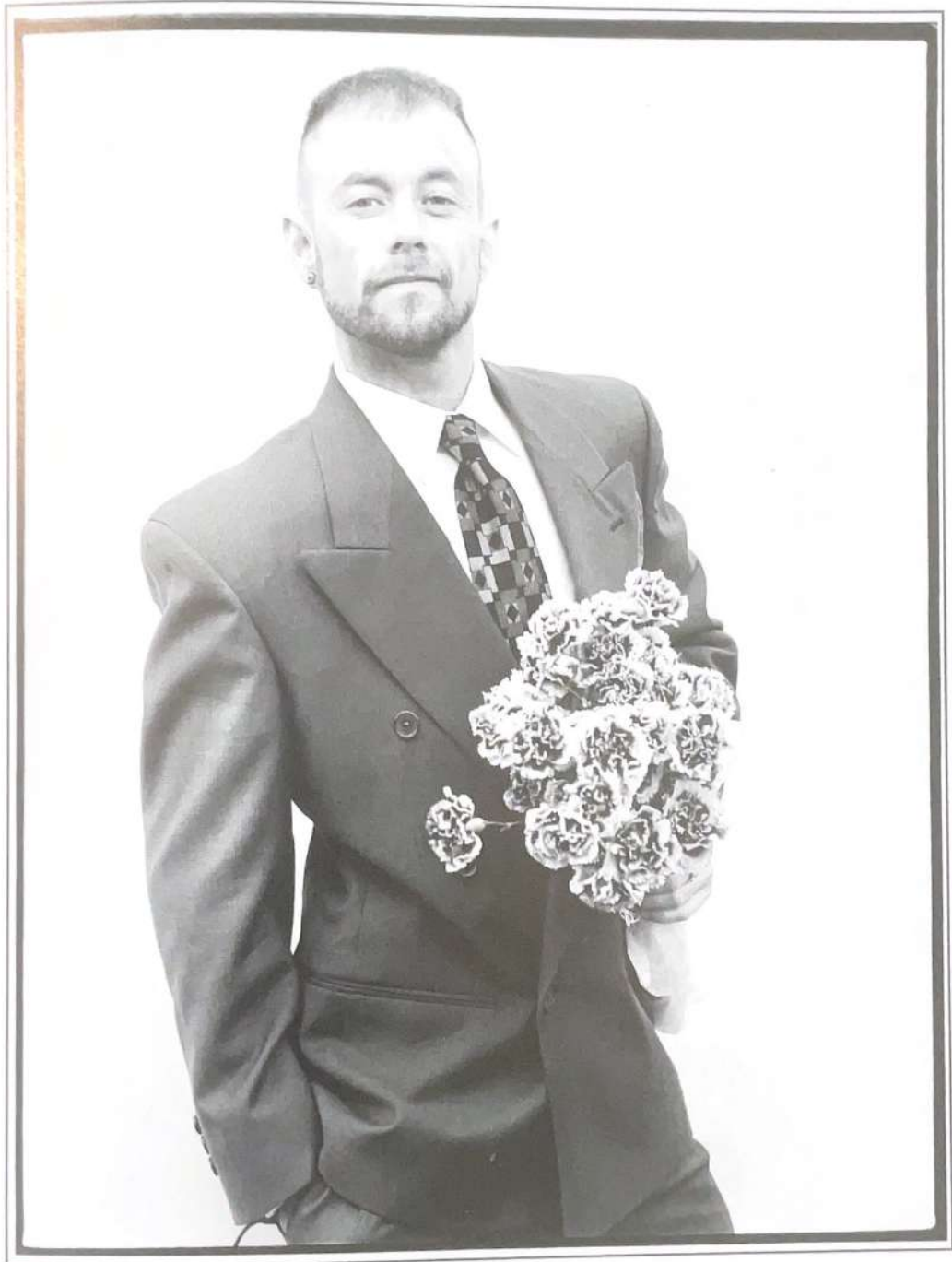
The Suit

I bought my first fine Italian suit at a shop for men five-eight and under. My good friend Terence told me about the store, where he had shopped himself. He assured me that I could find a variety of suits from which to choose, despite my slight stature, and that the salesmen would be very understanding since they were all short too. I was more than a little nervous about it. I knew next to nothing about men's fine clothing: I had never put on a tie or even owned a pair of dress shoes.

Fortunately, Terence agreed to come with me for moral support, and I set out on one of my first coming-of-age adventures. Upon arrival, we were graciously met by a well-groomed fellow who quickly summed me up. Obviously I was a working-class joe who had never dressed a day in his life – not very far from the truth really. Relieved by his assumption, I was glad to avail myself of his expertise.

After what seemed like hours of deliberation about color, style and fabric, I finally made a selection. Marvin, the tailor, asked me to try on the suit so he could refine the fit of my manly new garment. While he measured and creased, he told me important things about being a man of taste: about the cut of a good tie, the difference between a Windsor and a Full Windsor, that I should never lean back in a chair while wearing my coat, and to always pull up my socks. I remember panicking when Marvin asked which side I dressed on (I quickly thought about being right-handed). He speculated that women would find me irresistible in my lovely new suit and said that I must learn to slow dance. Marvin was adamant that I should never offer a rose on the first date: it should be a carnation instead. He also warned me that women who like ties can choke you in the heat of passion. BEWARE! Terence and I exchanged a quick glance at each other and laughed out loud. Boy, was I getting my money's worth – a tailored suit *and* free advice on dating etiquette!

After he showed me four different ways to fold my handkerchief, and I was out about six hundred clams, Marvin patted me on the back and expounded on how all the world respects a man in a good suit. I felt at least two inches taller when I walked out of there, and it wasn't because of the elevator shoes.

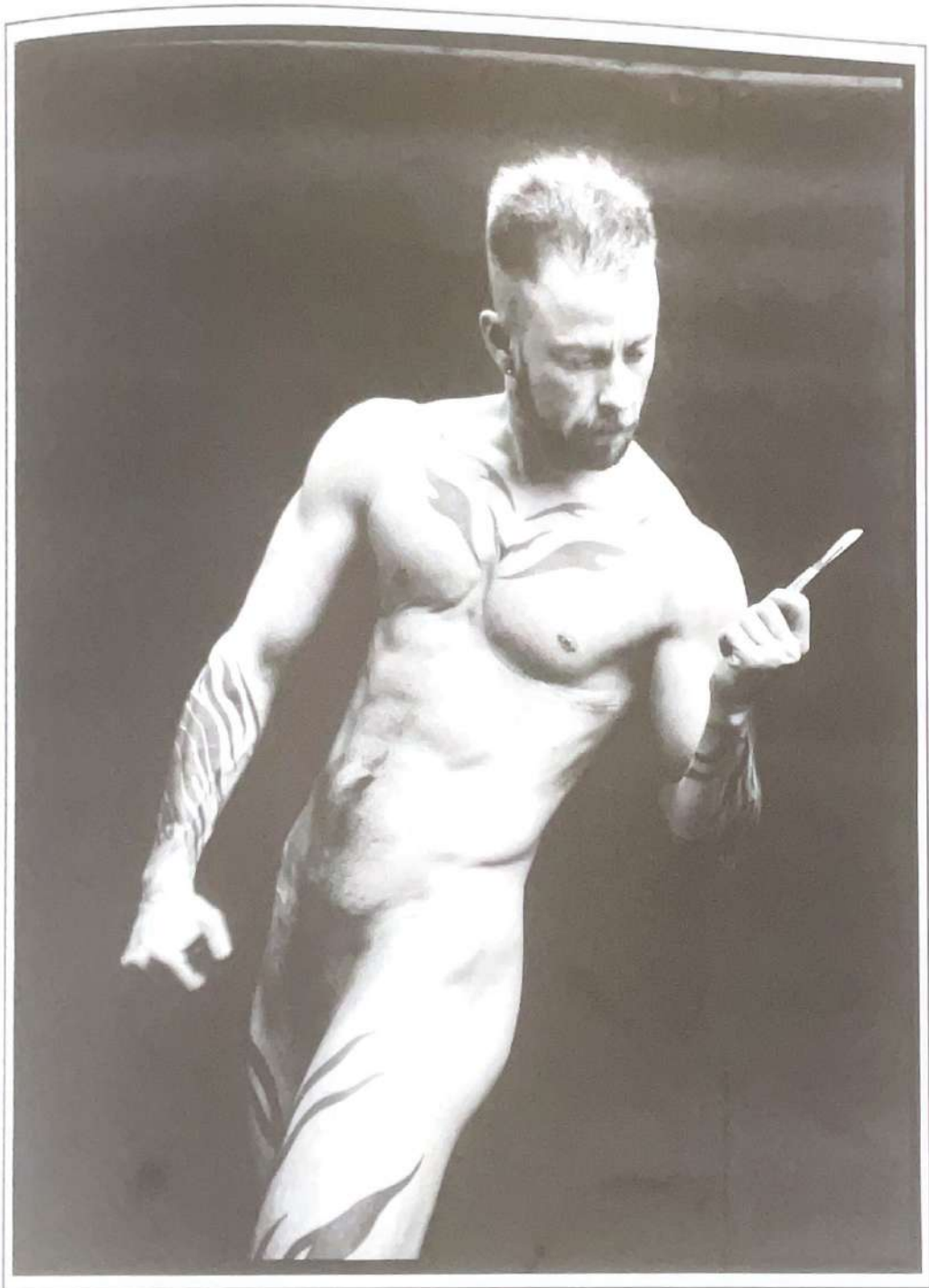




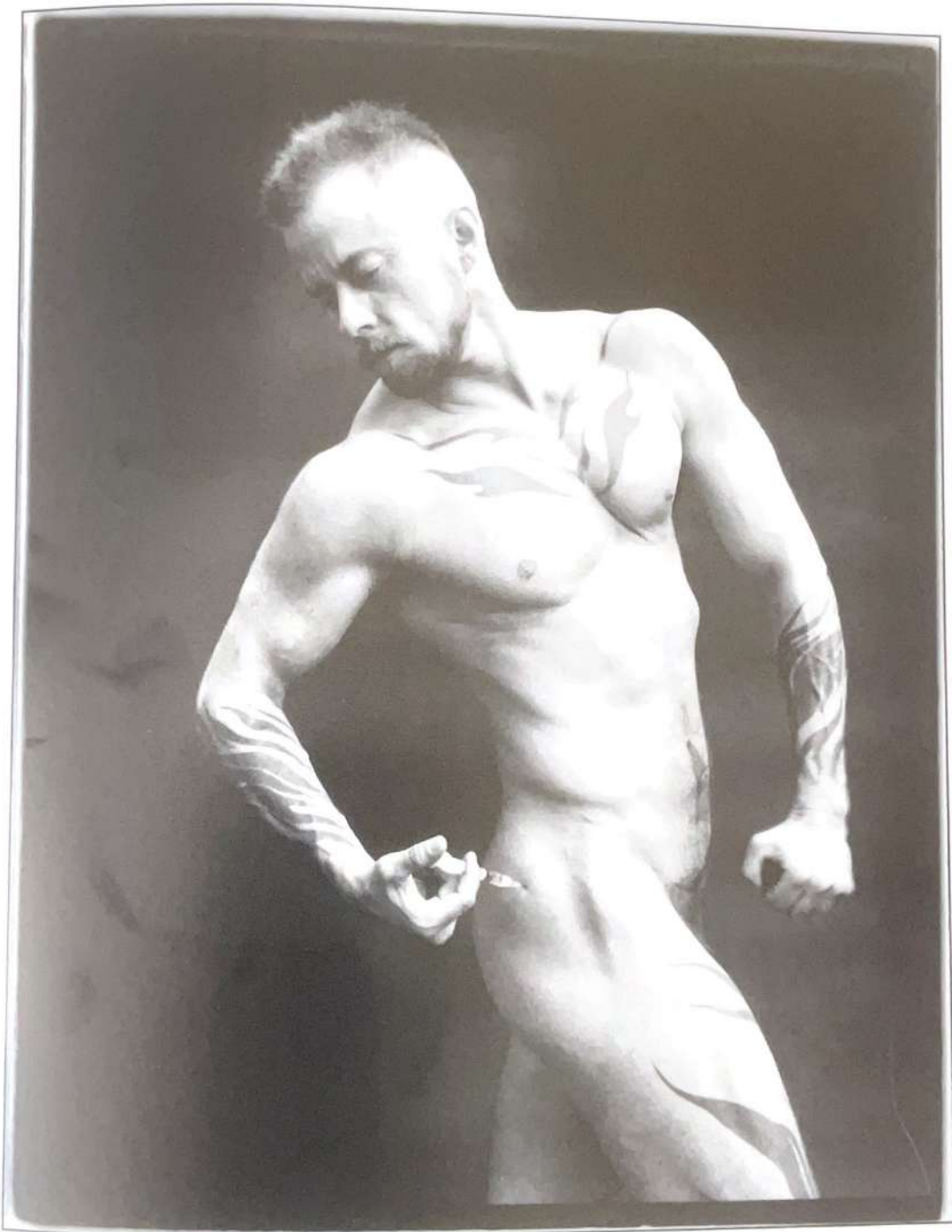
God's Will

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law.
Love is the law, love under will.

- Law of Thelema

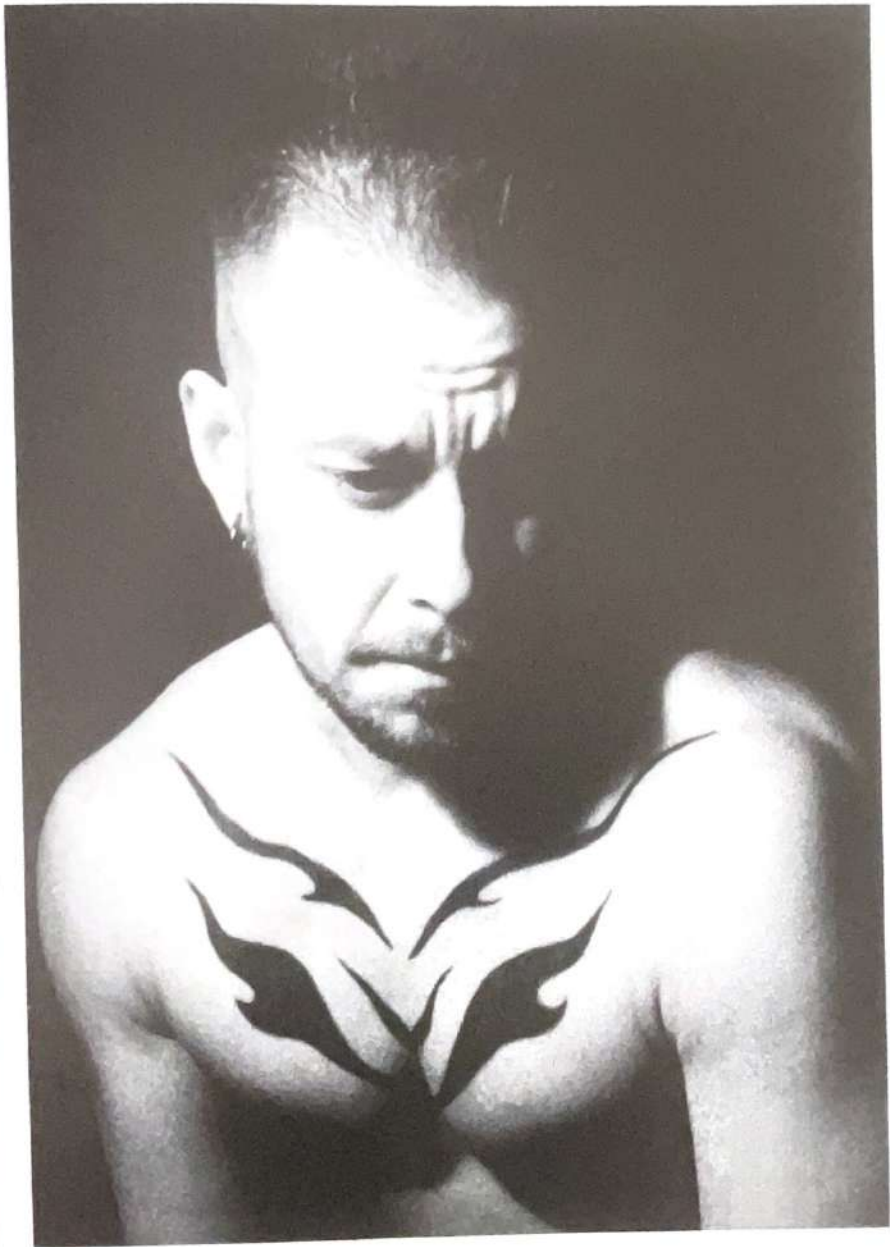




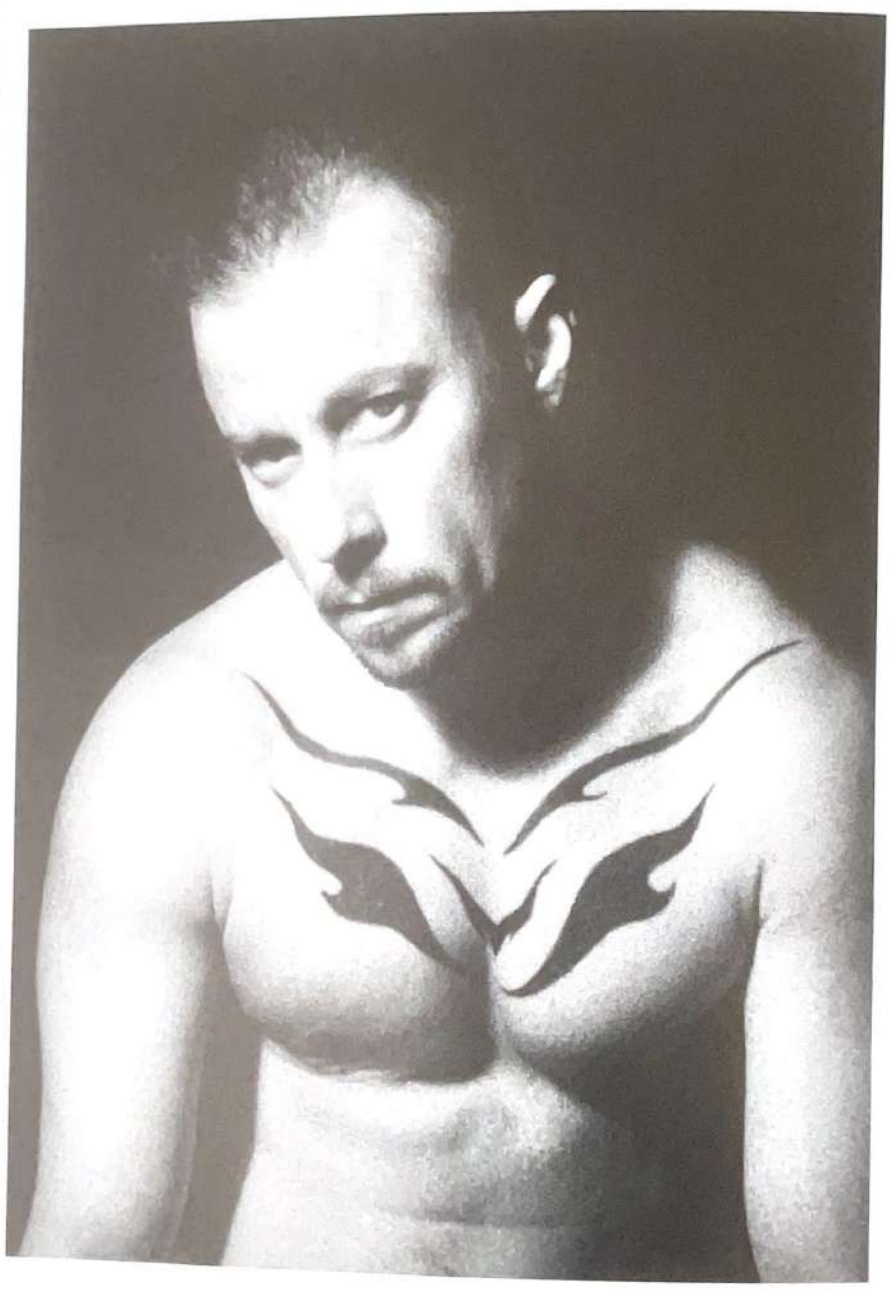


Distortions

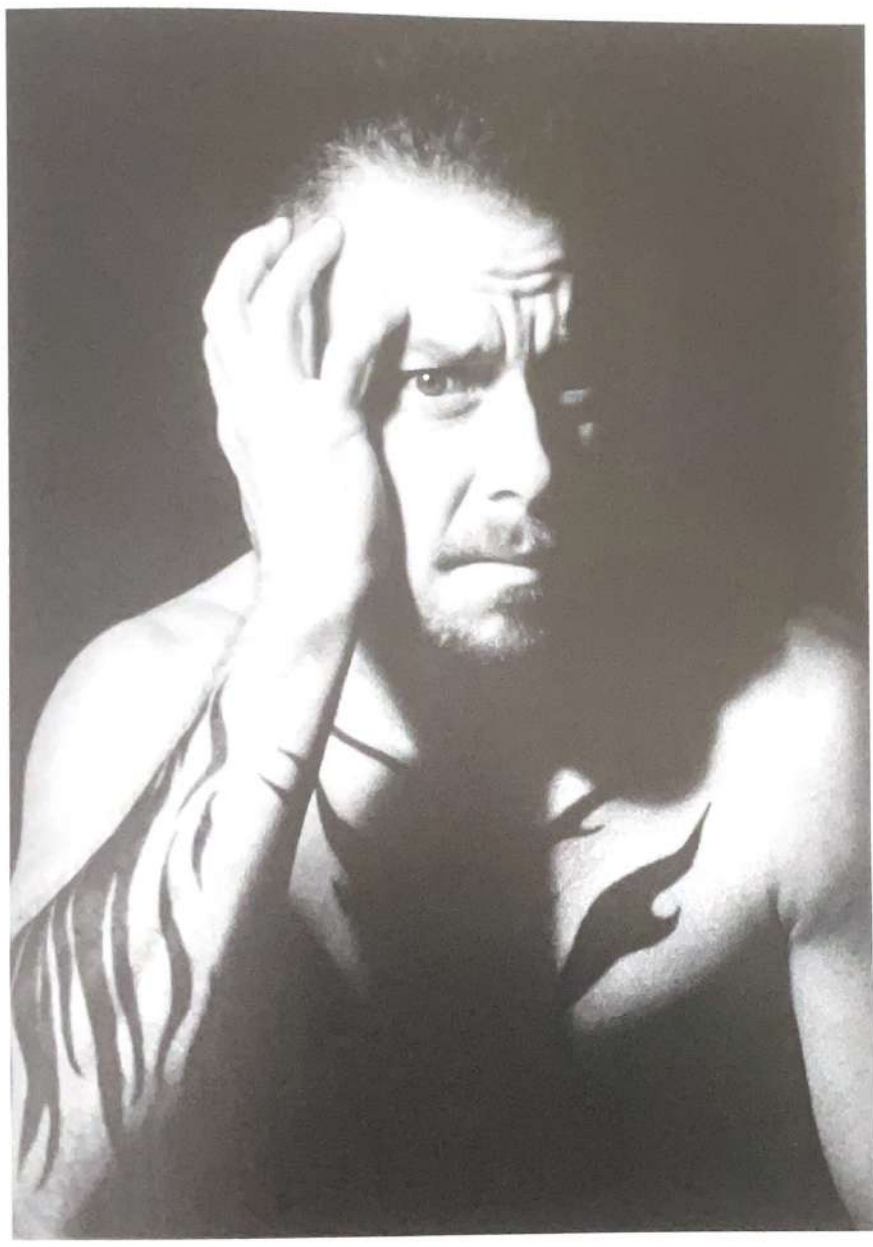
MEN ARE JERKS, WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO BE ONE? YOU'RE JUST A DYKE WITH A BEARD. ARE YOU MISOGYNIST? YOU WANT TO CUT OFF YOUR TITS? MAYBE YOU'RE JUST SEXUAL? YOU STILL LOOK FEMALE TO ME. HOMOPHOBIC. YOUR VOICE DOESN'T SOUND VERY MASCULINE. WHY CAN'T YOU JUST BE A BUTCH DYKE? DOES THIS MEAN YOU'RE HETERO. I JUST CAN'T GET USED TO CALLING YOU "HE".



**INTRIGUE ME. MY ATTRACTION TO YOU DOESN'T
BEST OF BOTH WORLDS. DO YOU HAVE A PENIS?
WOMEN. YOU'RE THE THIRD SEX! YOU
I LIKE VERY BUTCH WOMEN. YOU'RE THE
GRAPH? I'VE ALWAYS BEEN ATTRACTED TO HAIRY
WOMAN. I THINK TRANSEXUALS ARE SEXY.
YOU'RE SO EXOTIC! MAY I TAKE YOUR PHOTO.
MEAN I'M GAY: YOU'RE REALLY A**



**THIS IS WOMYN-ONLY SPACE. WHERE'S YOUR DICK? SORRY, BUT I DON'T LIKE MEN. YOU'RE NOT A
YOU: I'M NOT A LESBIAN. DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A REAL MAN? YOU'RE
MUST BE SOME KIND OF FREAK. I CAN'T BE WITH LIKE A WOMAN. YOU DON'T BELONG HERE.
MAN: YOU'LL NEVER SHOOT SPERM. YOU KIND OF SHORT, AREN'T YOU? YOU PISS**







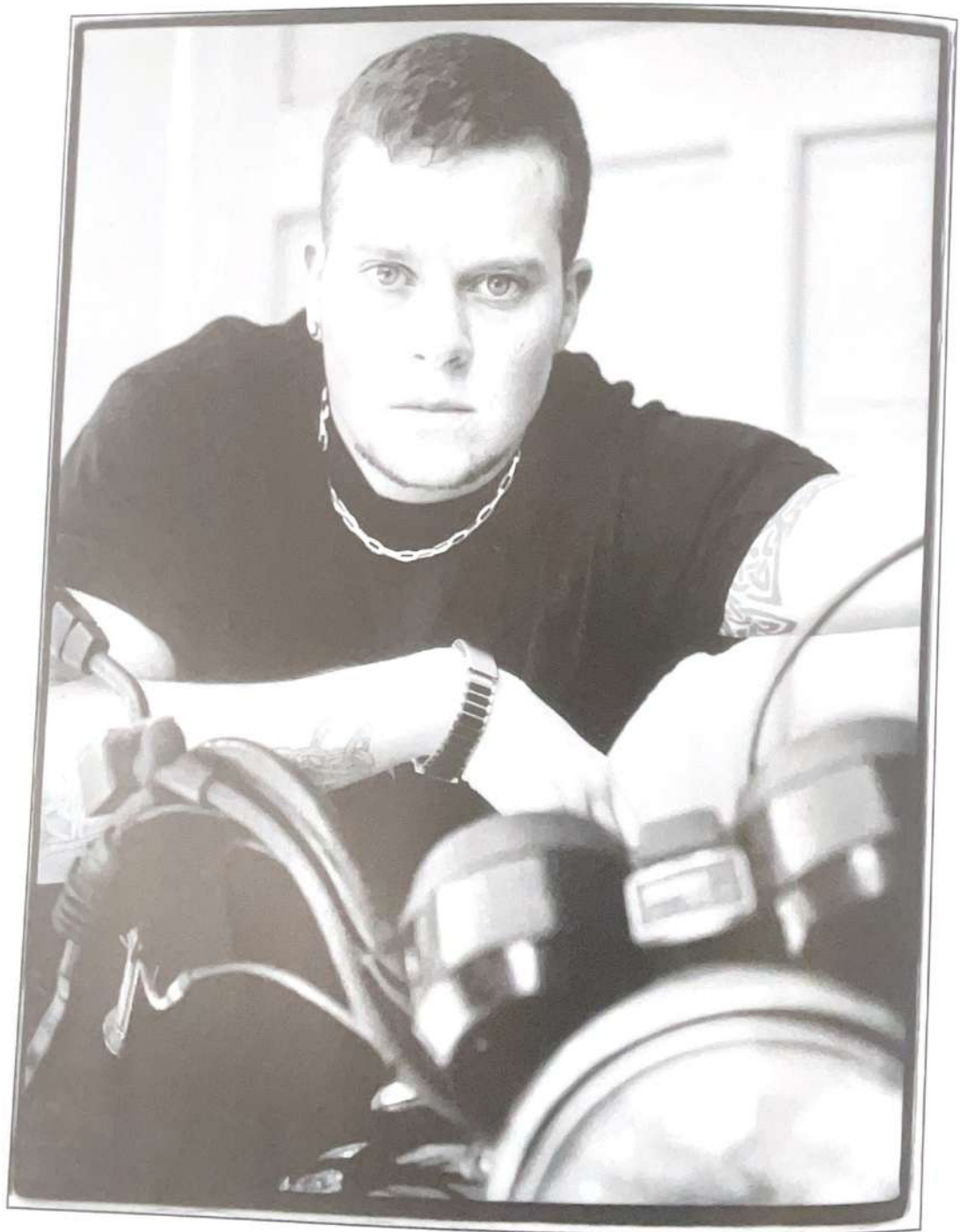
The New Man Series

Jeffrey Shevlowitz

I had no desire for a Bat Mitzvah (the female version of a Bar Mitzvah). I never even wanted to go to Hebrew school until I could go to a synagogue and be treated as a man there. Once I had made the change and had my mastectomy, I began going to temple. I took Torah study classes and eventually had my Bar Mitzvah.

My father never had a Bar Mitzvah ceremony, nor did my uncle or my brother, so in a way, I'm the only man in my family in at least two generations who actually went through a Bar Mitzvah ceremony. For me, it was an affirmation of my heritage and of who I am now. Traditionally, a young boy says during the ceremony, "Today I am a man." I always felt that this would be the perfect experience for me, and even though I didn't actually stand up there on the Bema and say it, the feelings were certainly there.





Matt Rice

I've been tending bar at a gay bar. The guys I work with have been fine. Sometimes when people find out, they make pronoun slips that they wouldn't have made before. There are patrons who come into the bar and refer to me as "she" and won't change it, even when I've told them it's not appropriate.

I think it's about what is and isn't okay. You know, because these guys are all masculine and really hyperconscious of being masculine and don't want to be perceived as feminine because then they would be nellie and that's just not okay. (It's a bear bar: bears and bikers. Harleys and flannel shirts.)

But there are men at the bar who are incredibly supportive.

In a lot of ways, I'm more empowered by men than by women. I've had a really hard time with dykes through my process. I've had lesbian lovers exclude me from their lives because I made the decision to stop

being in denial about my identity.

The biker guys are very cool.

They're probably the most accepting of me. The ones who have become my

friends have helped me explore how I feel about being a man, how I am a man differently than other people, and my kinship to other men. Some have really helped me sort through what it is that I want to take on as part of being a man.

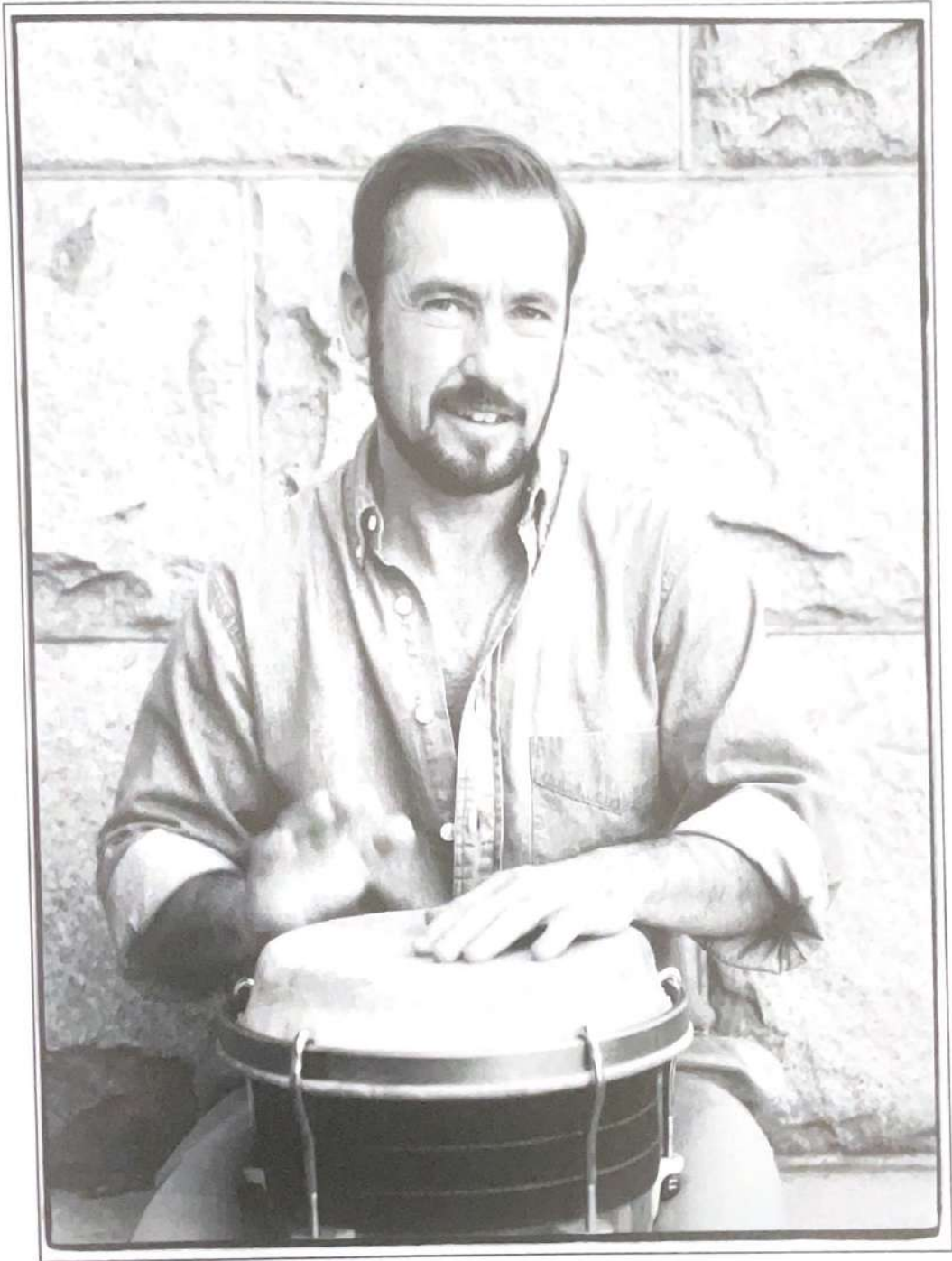
Many of my role models have been leathermen and perverts, so they understand that a young queer man is someone non-traditional. I think some people assume that transsexuals have this sexist stereotype about how they're supposed to act, and I've had men tell me that I don't have to be that way: "You can be any way you want to be, and it doesn't make you less of a man."

James Green

I lost my singing voice once I was on hormones, and drumming was something I had always wanted to do, so I joined a men's spiritual drumming group.

The group validated my masculinity, first of all, by just accepting me as a man with no strings attached, no questions. After about a year, I was asked to fill a leadership role, and at that point, I thought I should tell them about my history as a woman. After a short period, these men expressed admiration for me because of my transition to manhood.

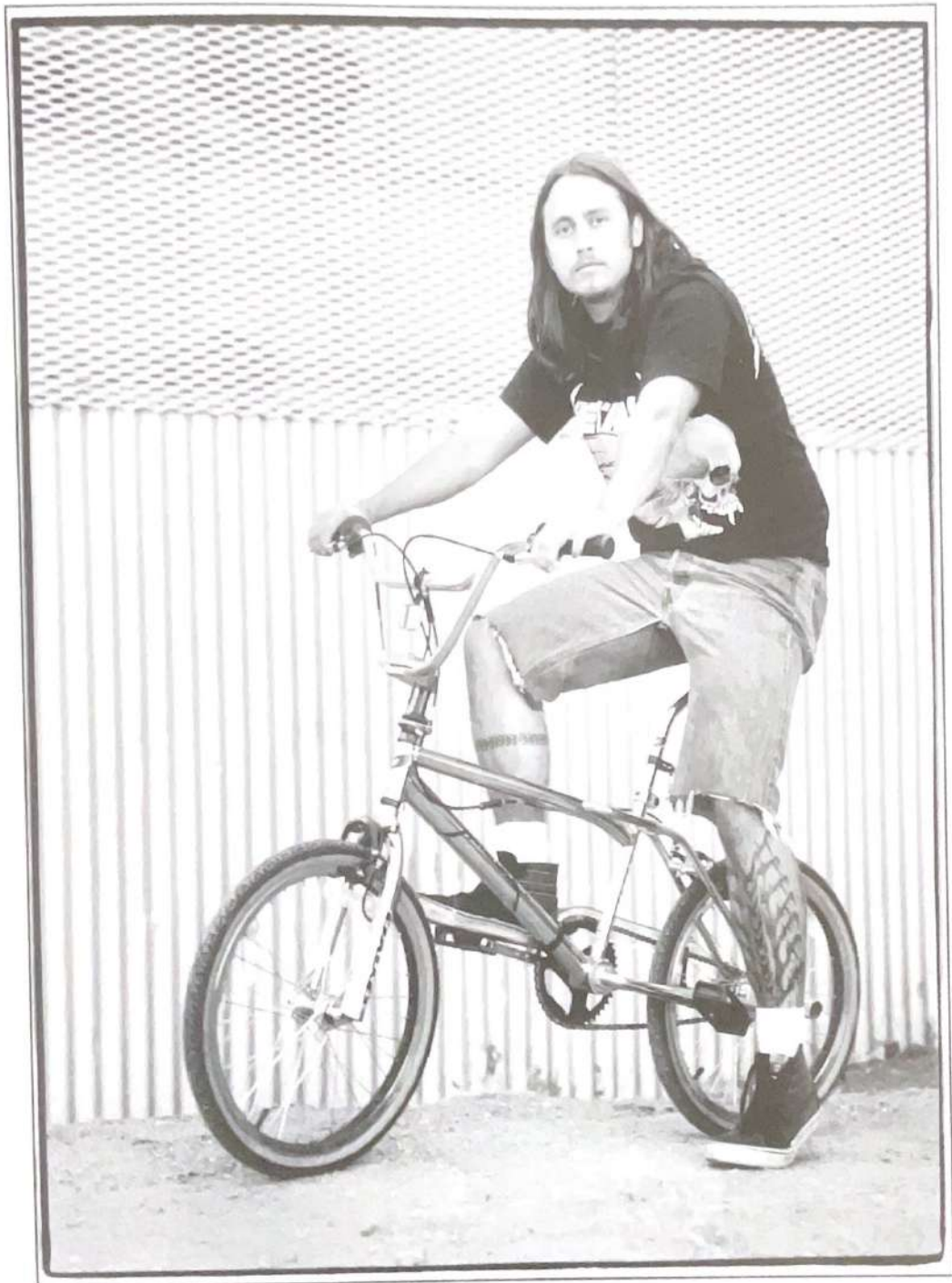
Being in the group accelerated my acceptance of myself as a man. I went into this place that had concentrated male energy, dealt with male issues and never had my own masculine identity questioned or challenged. This experience in itself solidified my feeling that my masculinity was just fine the way it was.



Erik

I am having to relearn how to be around women. You know, it's like being in high school again. How do you ask someone out, or just hang out? It's very different now. I feel the same but I'm seen differently. I've always dressed and acted this way. I'm basically the same person, except before, I looked like a female.

I've heard how women talk about men, and I don't ever want to be that fool. I don't want to be misunderstood or seen as sexist because of what I look like. I like being a guy, and it has nothing to do with power. I just look like how I feel.



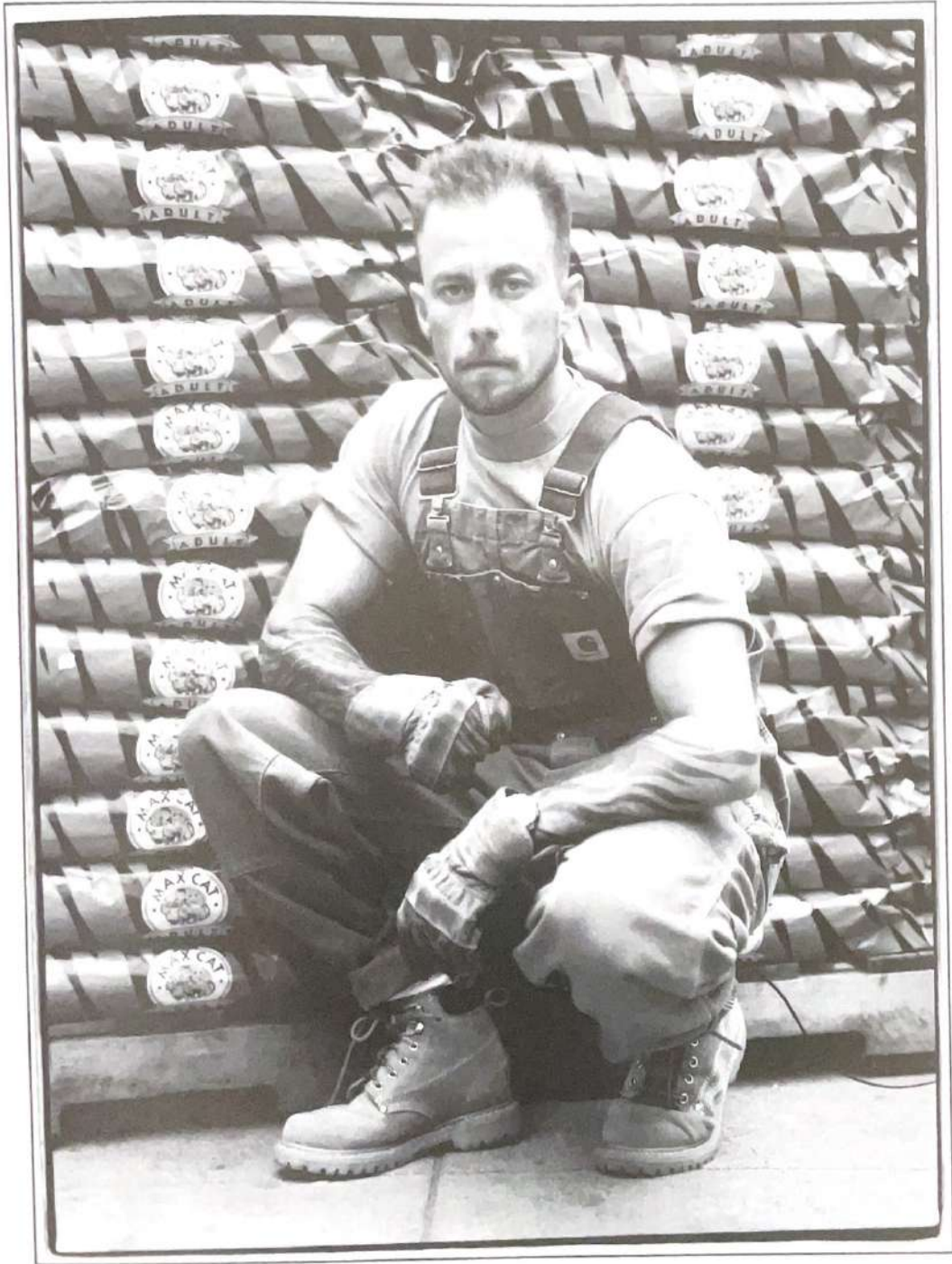
Loren Cameron

I learned a lot about hard work from my father. He taught me how to mend fences and haul hay, and sometimes we worked right into the night if rain was coming. He grew up during the Depression and quit school when he was thirteen to work to feed his family. He broke horses and attended night school to become an electrical engineer. When he died, he was the boss of a big nuclear plant.

My dad believed everybody should pull himself up by his own bootstraps, and even though I was his daughter, he raised me to have the same masculine work ethic. He was often impatient and a perfectionist and had trouble showing me that he loved me, but he had a real soft spot for animals. We always had lots of horses, about thirty or forty cats and a bunch of dogs. With them, you could see how sensitive he was.

I guess I'm a lot like him that way, and since my change, I look like him too. As I get older, it gets easier to understand and appreciate him for who he was—and to forgive and forget our differences.

The last time I saw him, he told me that I had a lot of guts to move to California with only a duffel bag and a hundred bucks in my pocket. I think if he could see me now, he would be proud to call me his son.





Our Bodies

Genital Reconstruction

The following images are of reconstructed genitalia. These are photos of three different models. Two of them are representations of a procedure known as "metoidioplasty." The third model is an example of "phalloplasty."

Metoidioplasty, in simple terms, enlarges the clitoris through the use of the hormone testosterone. The clitoral hood then becomes a foreskin, and silicone testicles are implanted in the larger, outer labia. The clitoris, inherently shaped like a small penis, remains sexually responsive and becomes erect without prosthetic assistance.

Phalloplasty is the construction of a phallus using a skin graft from another part of the body, such as a flap of skin from the back, belly, thigh or forearm. A prosthetic device is implanted, and after a complex surgical procedure, the new penis can both urinate and become erect. Silicone implants in the outer labia serve as testicles.

It should be said that not every transsexual man elects to have genital reconstruction for reasons ranging from fear of surgical complication and discomfort to simply being unable to afford it. Some find the current surgical options unacceptable, either aesthetically or functionally. Others don't feel it is a matter of choice: they are too uncomfortable without it.

Metoidioplasty: Subject 1

I have to wear two pairs of trunks at the swimming pool because I don't think the bulge in my pants is big enough. It's really obvious when my clothing is wet. Without a larger phallus, the testicle implants alone just don't give the look I want. I try to appreciate what I have since my surgery, but it's hard when I live in a society that associates penis size with a man's worth.

I'm not convinced that most women are concerned with the size of a man's penis (even a guy with a small dick can do a lot of stuff), but I can't even ejaculate, much less penetrate! It isolates and handicaps me in an invisible sort of way. I'm really angry about it!

I don't always think I'm inadequate though. My last lover didn't seem to mind at all. In fact, I think she enjoyed not having to use a diaphragm or other contraceptives. She acted as though my size was normal. I guess it was good enough for her because she loved me.

If I were pressed to call it an enlarged clitoris, I would have to admit that that's what it is. It just can't function exactly like a penis. I wish I could delude myself, but I can't.





Metoidioplasty: Subject 2

I feel better having my genitals on the outside of my body. That protrusion is important: it's symbolic of the expression of myself as a man in the world. Really, on a day-to-day basis, it doesn't make that much difference. I mean, I don't wear tight pants, so there's no bulge that shows, and I don't care about that anyway. But in terms of presenting myself to a potential partner, having genitalia that look somewhat like they're supposed to helps me feel confident.

Although I am very conscious of being different, I feel sure of myself as a lover. In my fantasies, I might imagine having a larger penis, but in reality, it doesn't matter. My surgery is good enough. I have sexual function, and now I have a body that satisfies my needs: it reflects my own masculinity.

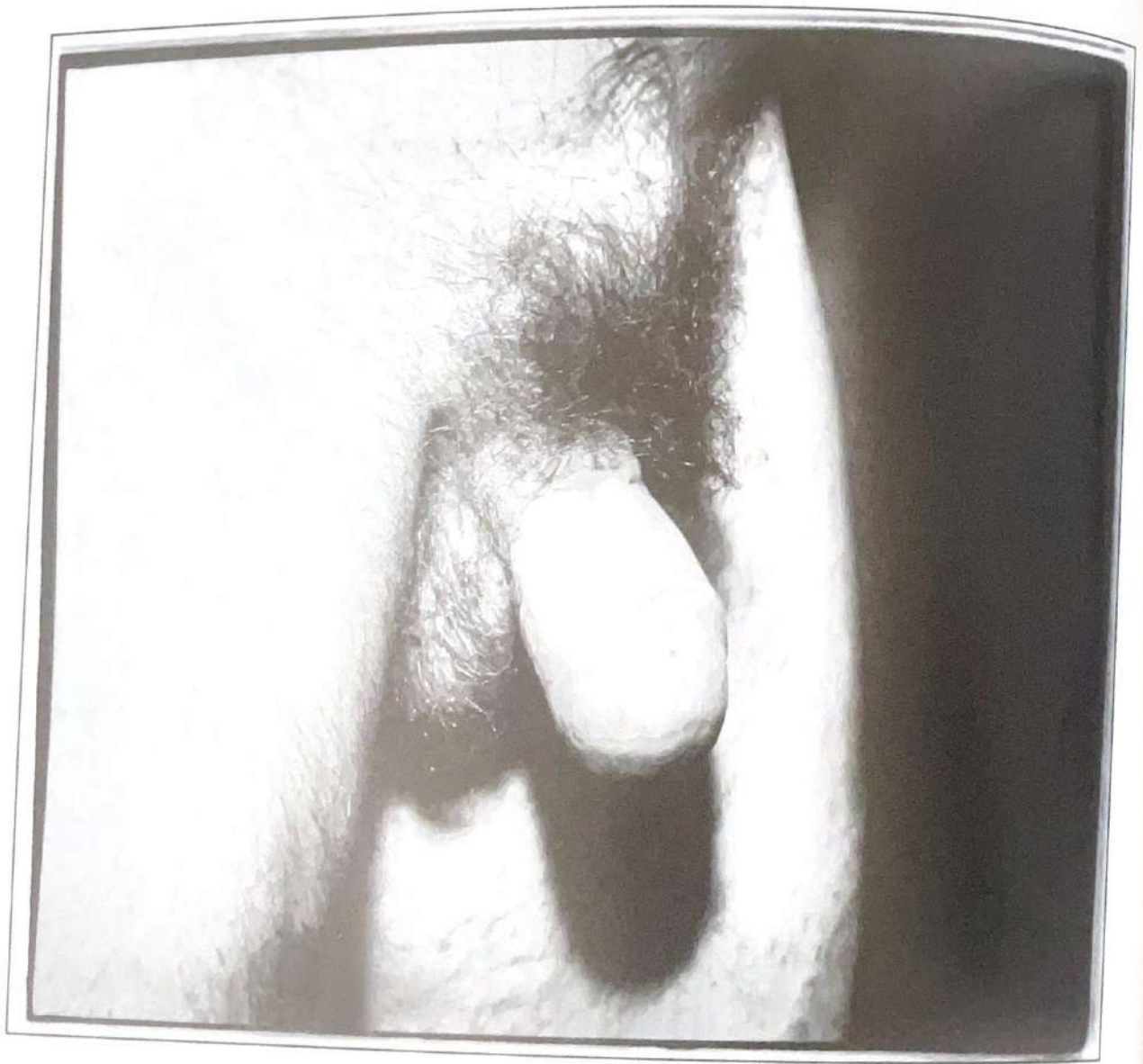
Phalloplasty: Subject 1

I met my girlfriend through a personals ad. During the time we were getting to know each other, I mentioned that I had had several surgeries and was having some cosmetic scar revisions. I didn't really go into it. I didn't tell her I was transsexual.

One evening, we were getting very intimate, and it became obvious that we were going to be sexual. I didn't see how I could stop everything and tell her. So we went into the bedroom, and I thought, maybe it being dark and all, she just wouldn't notice. She grabbed hold of it and started to give me a hand job. Then she abruptly stopped and said, "You haven't always been a man, have you?"

We're still seeing each other, and she hasn't said a whole lot about it other than she thinks it's a little too big to be comfortable. She says it looks fine, but she prefers oral sex to intercourse because it's a bit painful for her.

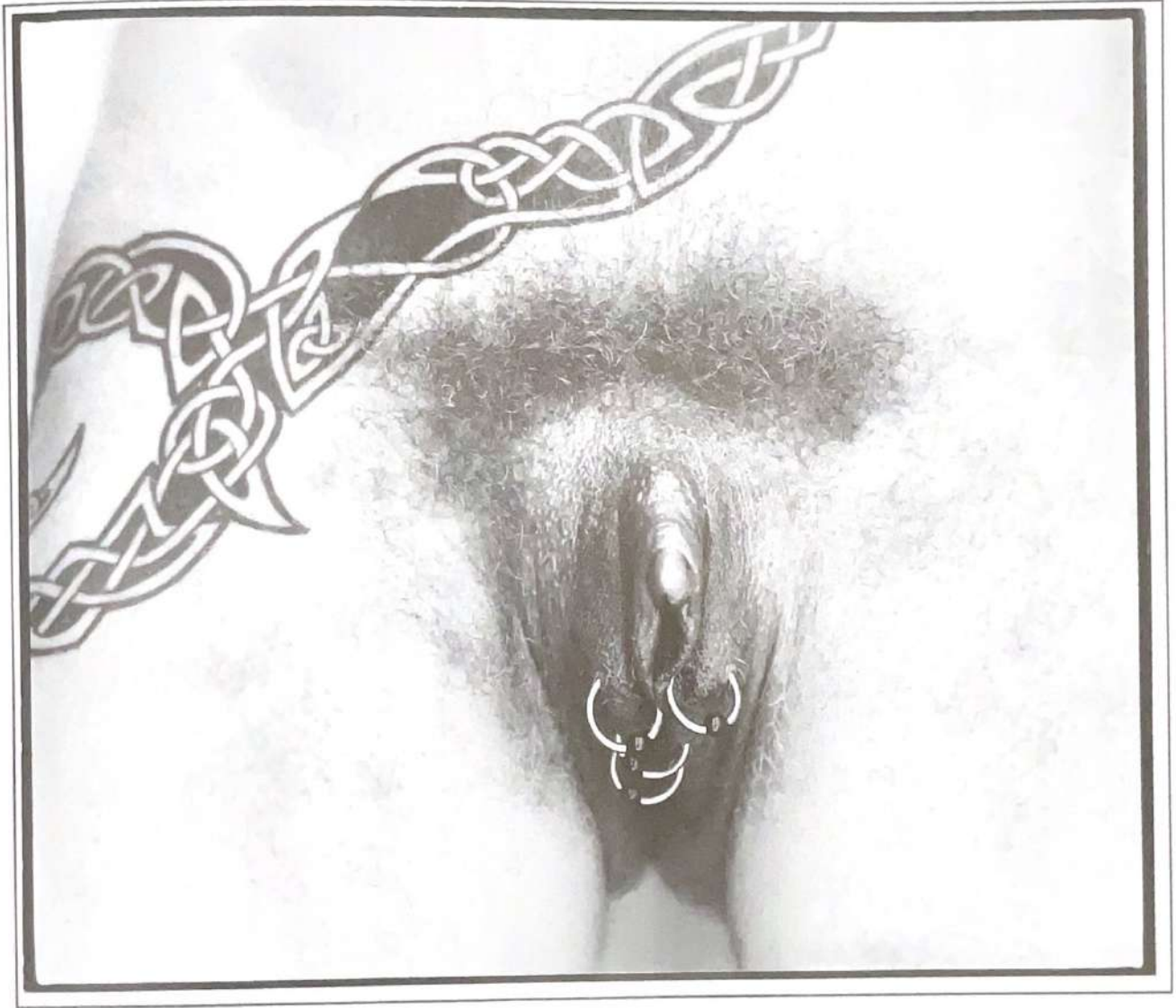






Alternative Genital Modification

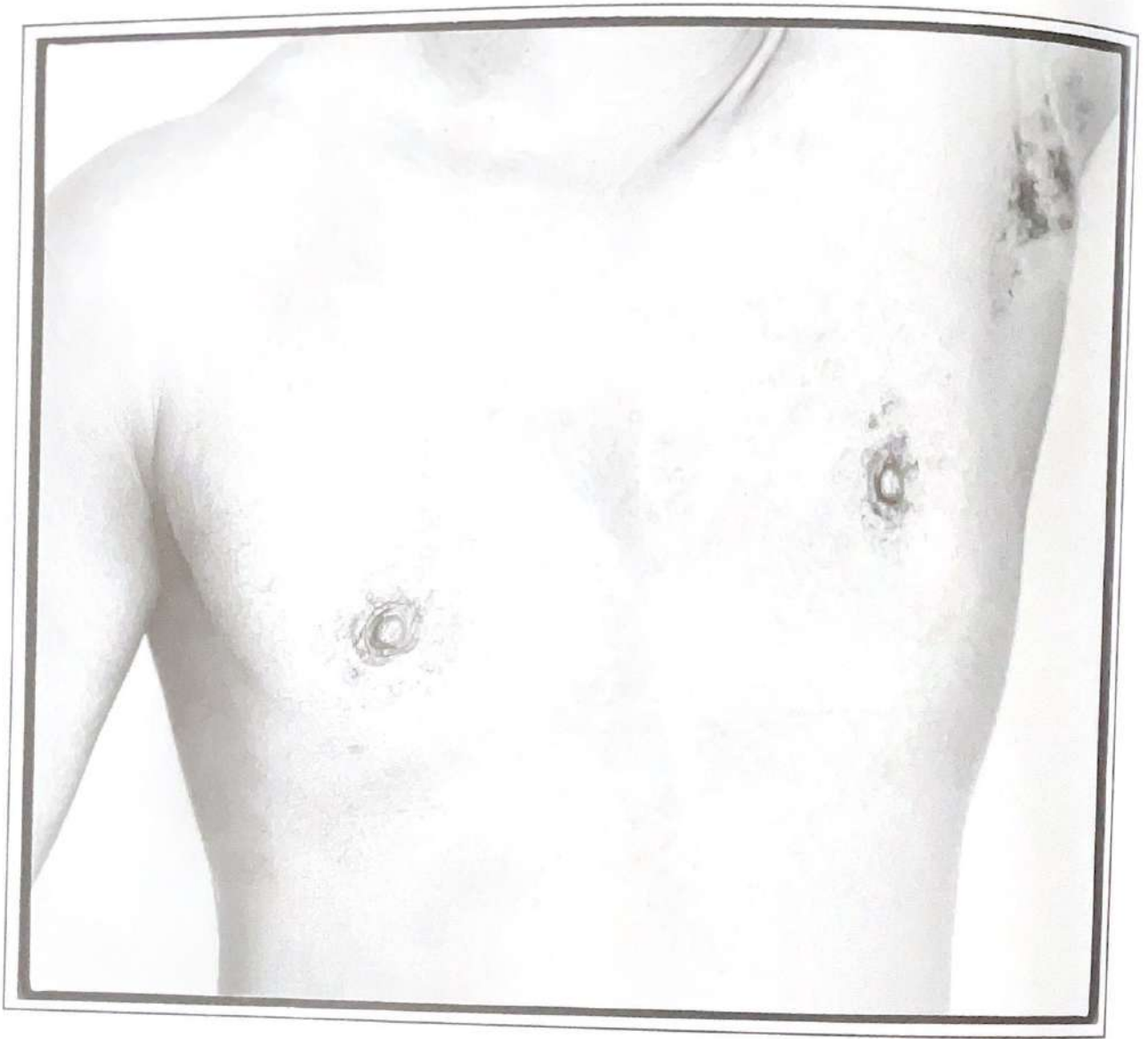
Some transsexual men have been exploring alternatives to genital surgery by modifying their bodies with piercings. The subject in this photograph has been taking testosterone: his clitoral enlargement is hormonally induced. Through a series of piercings, he is gradually pulling his larger, outer labia together with several rings. By doing so, he hopes to produce a scrotum-like appearance and place more visual emphasis on his enlarged clitoris. This type of genital modification is relatively inexpensive and accessible, and does not compromise sexual and excretory functions.



Chest Reconstruction: Subjects 1 and 2

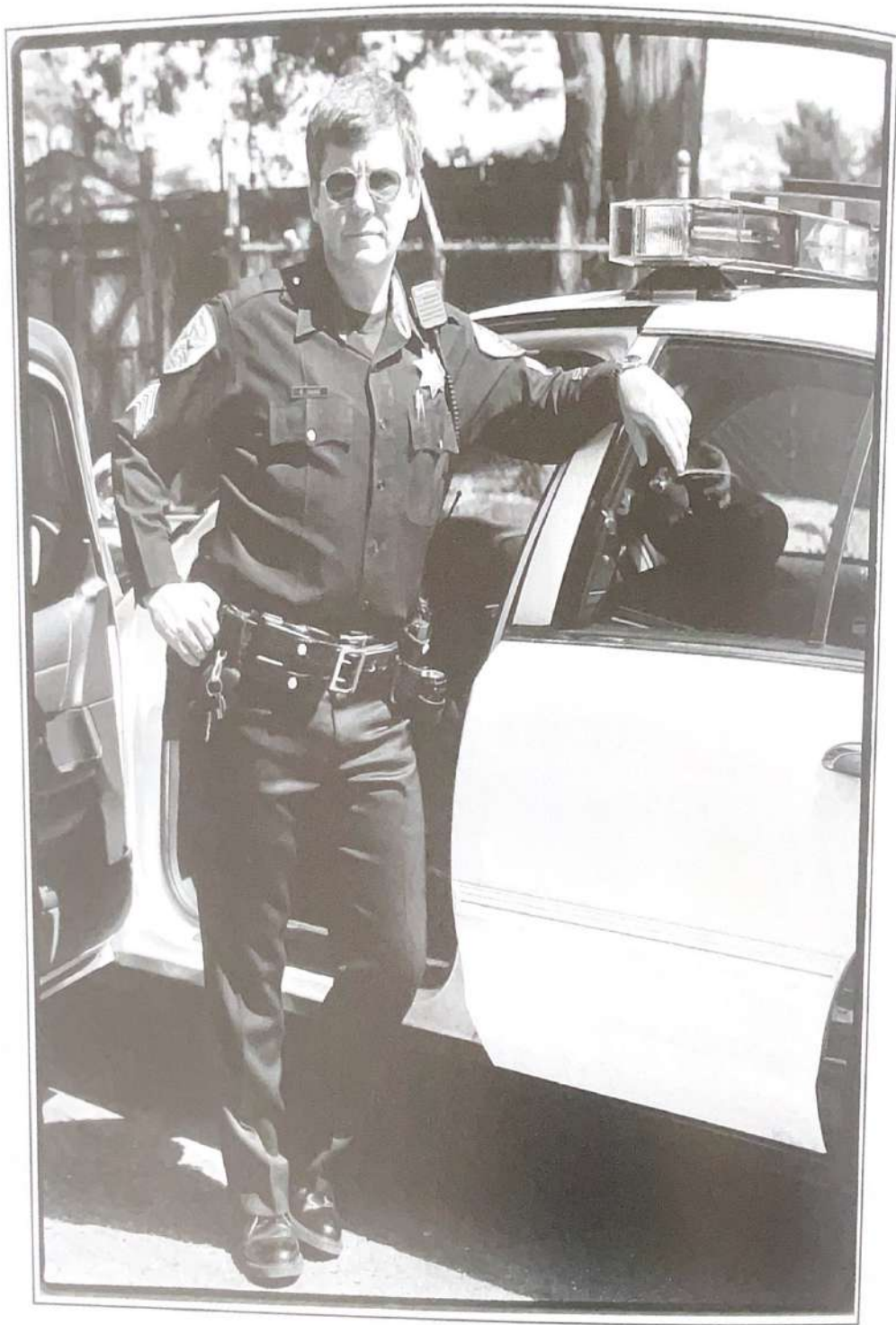
Many transsexual men feel discomfort with having breasts and usually obtain reconstructive chest surgery as soon as possible. Surgeons employ different techniques when reconstructing a chest, and much is determined by a person's initial breast size. In the following two examples, Chest Subject 1 has undergone a complete bilateral mastectomy. Both nipples have been reconstructed from one nipple and grafted into place. Having had small breasts, Chest Subject 2 underwent a simple reduction in which an incision was made at each nipple and all excess internal fatty tissue was removed. No surface tissue needed to be cut away, and the nipples were not repositioned. He retains all nipple sensation.







Fellas



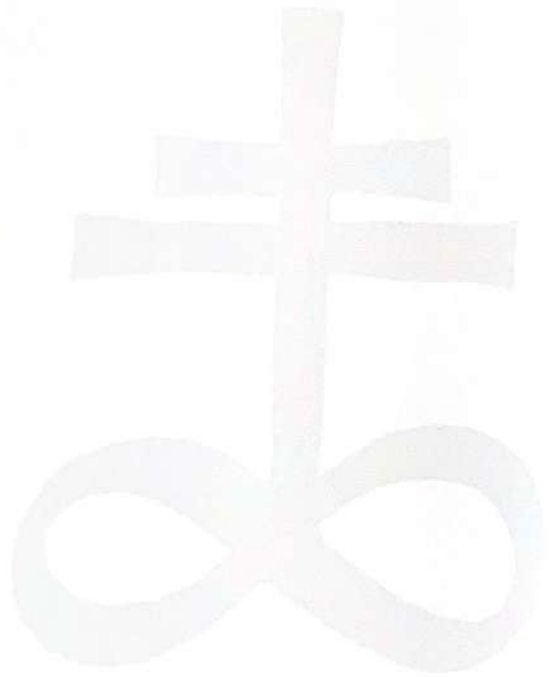
Sergeant Stephan Thorne

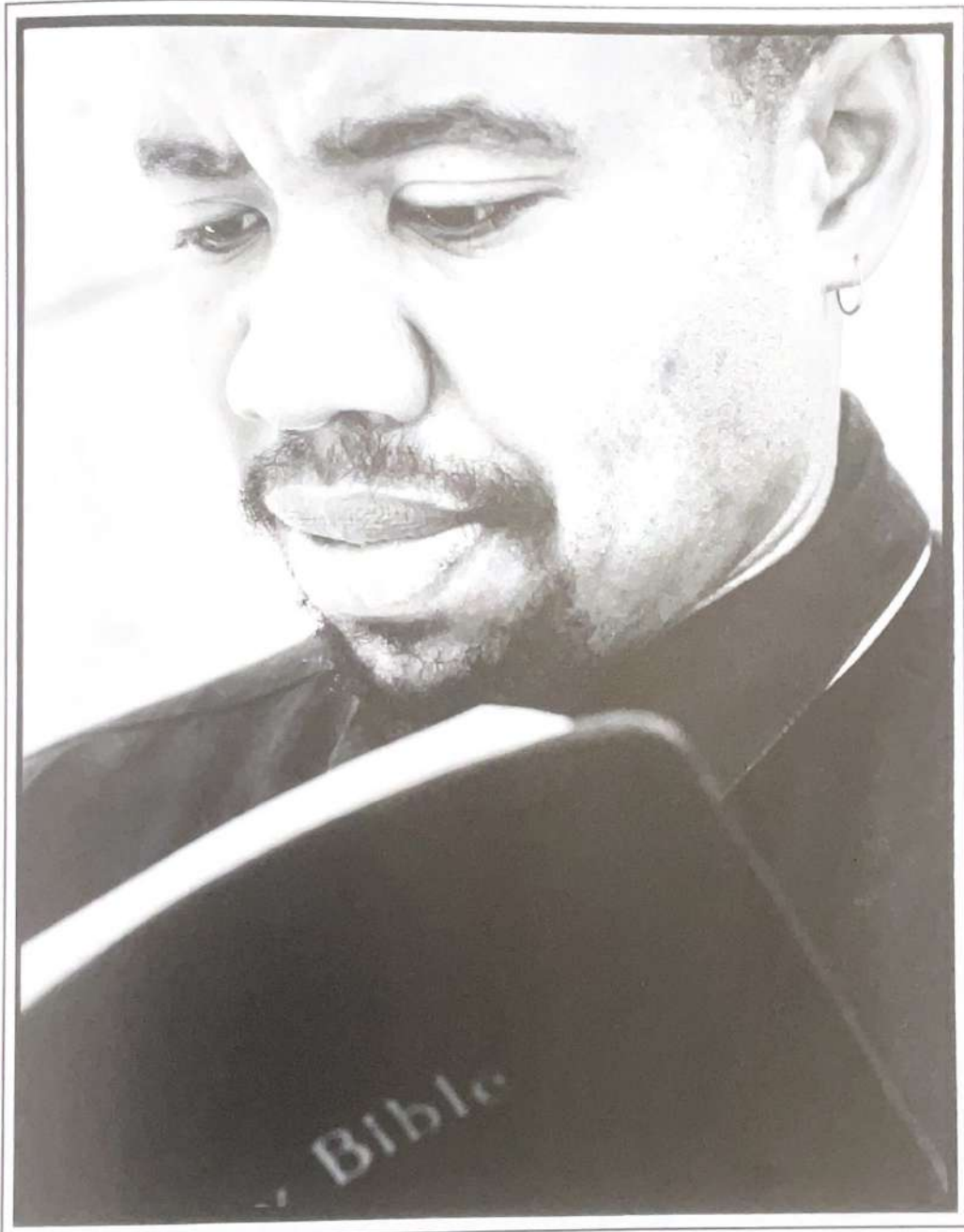
Sgt. Stephan Thorne has been a police officer for sixteen years. Having received a bronze medal of valor, his record with his department is exemplary. He has been a strong voice in affirmative-action policies throughout his career, and in 1994, he set a precedent in the force by transitioning on the job. Since then, he has been largely responsible for transgender sensitivity training among fellow officers.



Tony

Tony is a single parent raising two children. He served in the United States Army and is now employed as an electrician. A devout member of the Church of Christ, Tony recently met a woman, and they are about to be married.

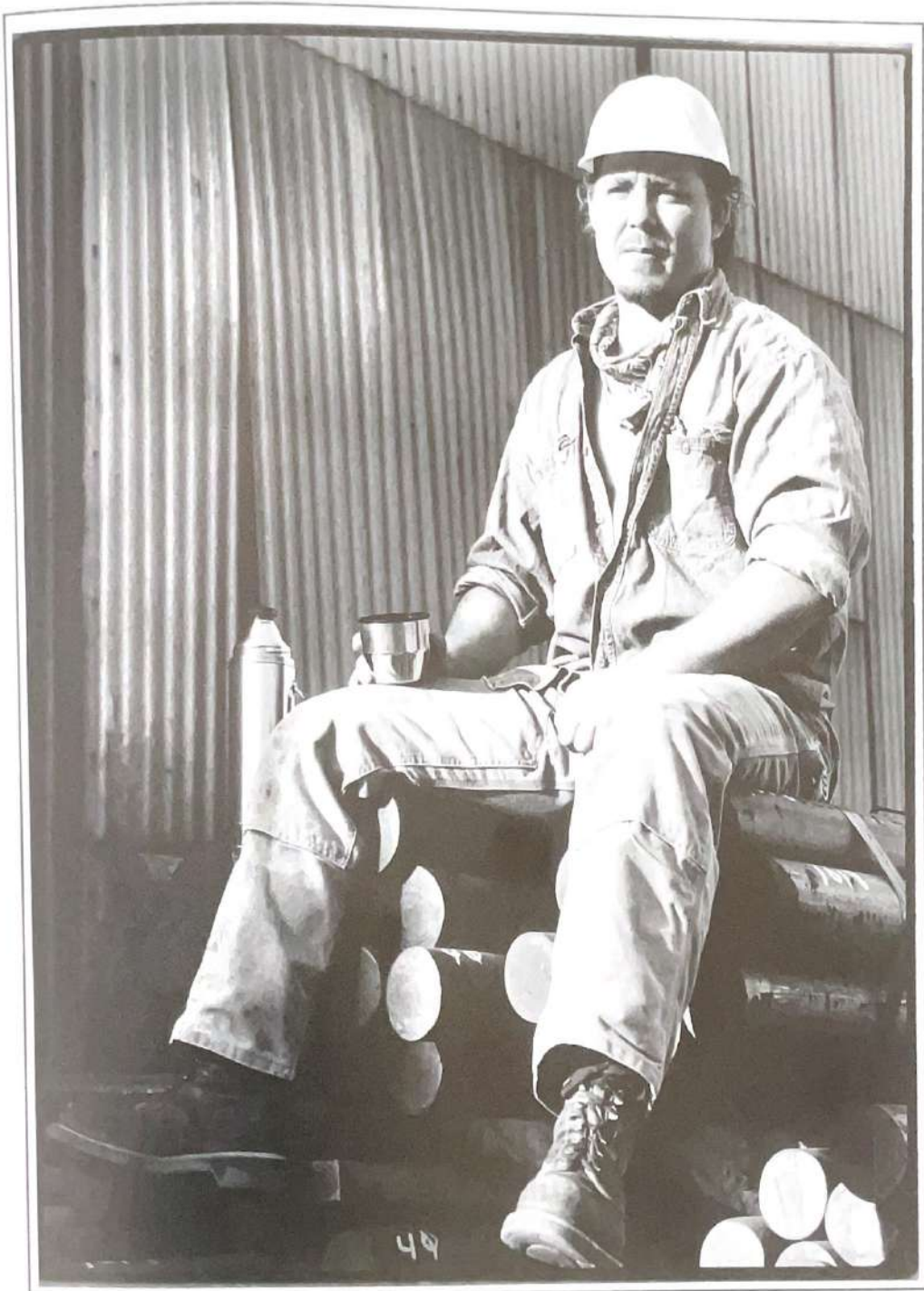




Chris

Chris is a skilled blue-collar worker. Struggling as a single parent, he works two shifts a day at two different factories. In addition, he manages to maintain a long-distance relationship with his girlfriend by frequently driving three hundred miles to see her. Chris doesn't sleep much.







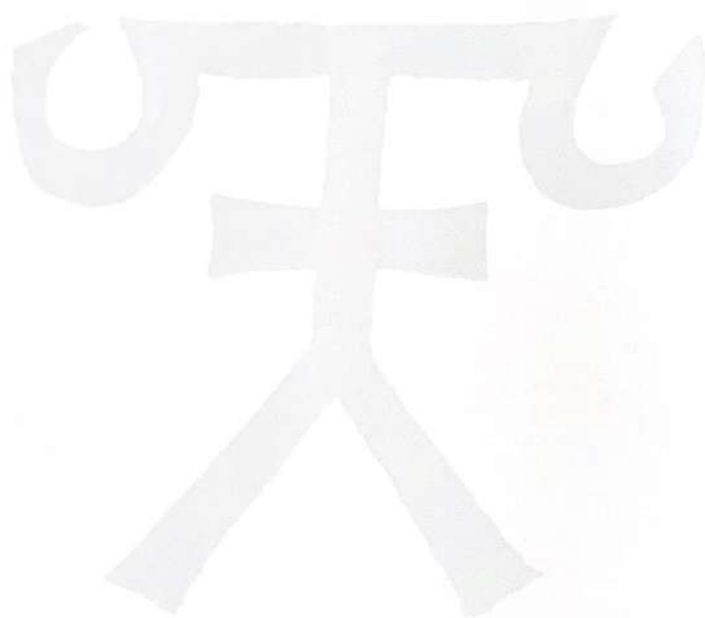
Doctor Stephen Whittle

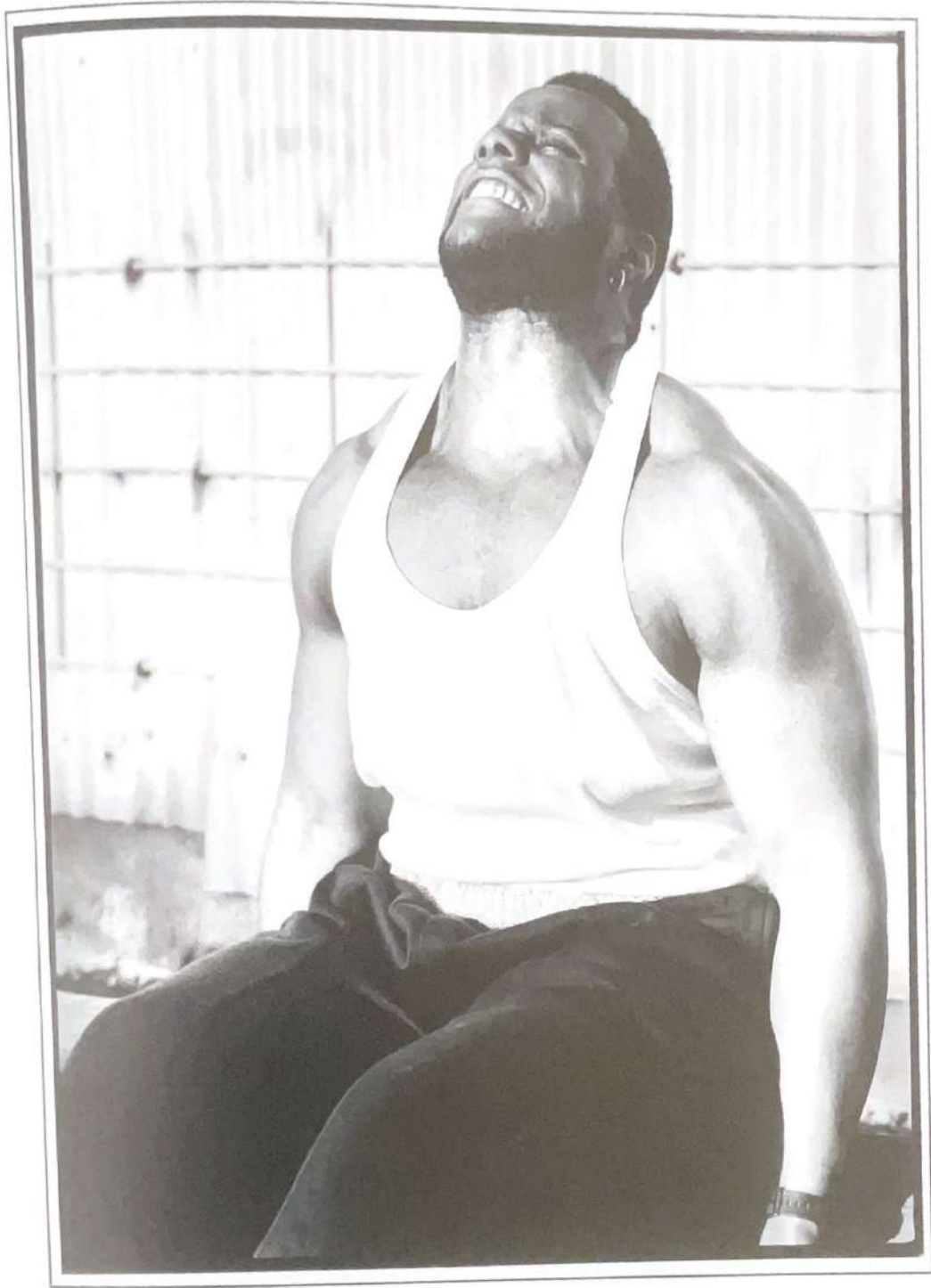
Dr. Stephen Whittle teaches law at Manchester Metropolitan University. He coordinates the U.K.'s FTM Network and is vice-president of Press for Change, the lobbying group that campaigns for transsexual rights. Stephen also writes essays on sexuality and gender issues. He lives with his partner of seventeen years, Sarah, and their two children, who were conceived by donor insemination. Dr. Whittle's more casual interests include a nostalgia for the historical lawmen of the American Wild West.

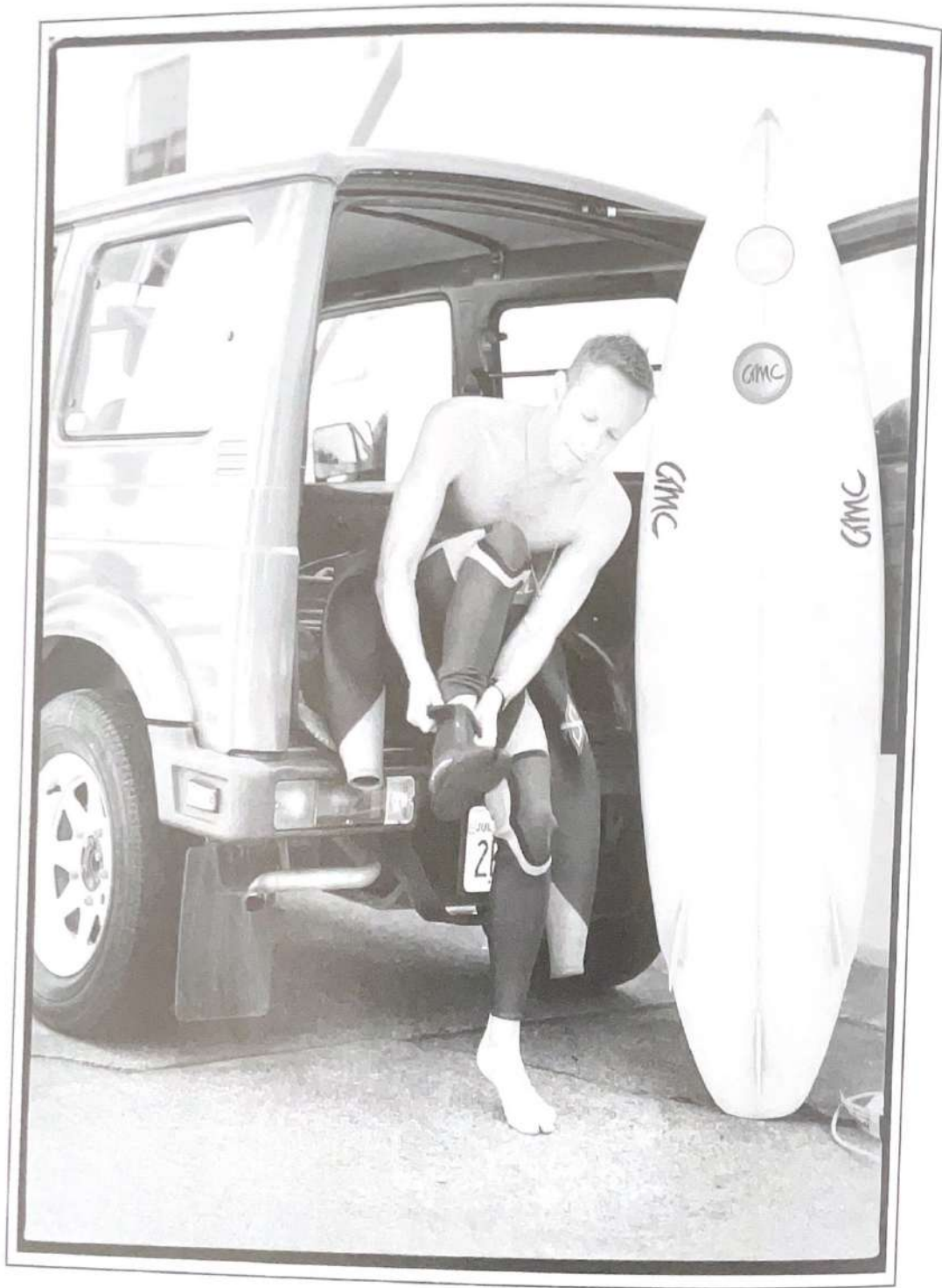


Chase

An avid body-building fan, Chase is a self-employed fitness trainer. He is a disciplined, competitive athlete, capable of bench pressing over three hundred pounds during peak conditioning. Chase's other interests include political science and financial investing. Currently, he is in school pursuing a degree.







Brynn

A writer and graphic designer by profession, Brynn is also a surfing enthusiast and a mother. Passionate about his life since transition, he is committed to progressive political ideals. His life is further enriched by his eighteen-year-old daughter and his wide circle of friends.



Emergence

David Harrison

On some level, I was always attracted to men, but I just couldn't relate to them when I was a woman. It just didn't fit. When I was female, I was a lesbian. As a man, I find I still like that same-sex relationship dynamic. There's something more sexually exciting about it. I don't have to be so aware of what gender I am. The culture constantly reinforces gender stereotypes in male/female relationships, which makes them very complicated. I know some people enjoy that contrast, but it's not what I prefer.

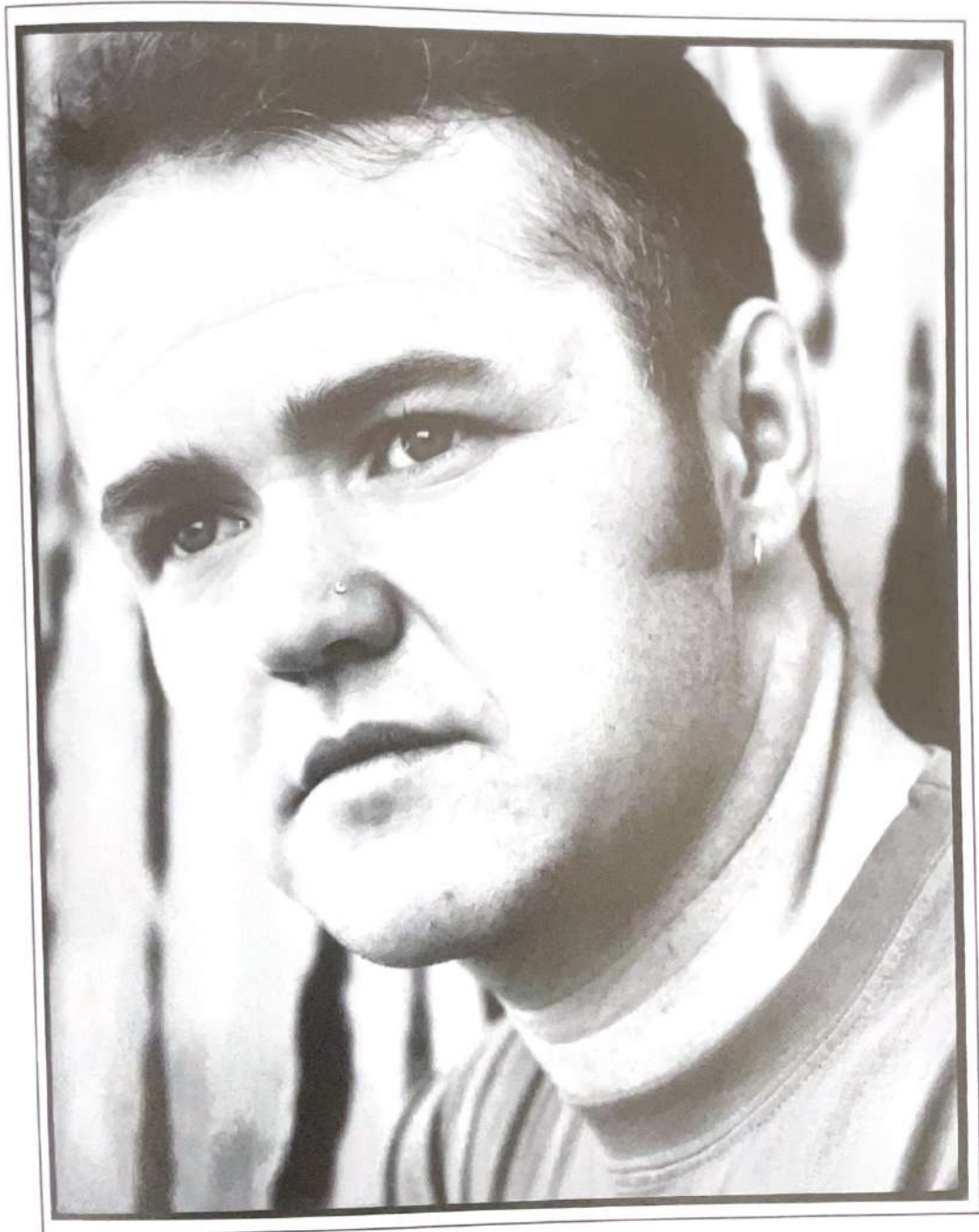
My attraction to men is very visceral. I enjoy them aesthetically, in terms of muscles, genitals and legs. I look at male bodies a lot, and maybe I look at myself in relation to them because of my own physical evolution as a transsexual man.

When I placed a personals ad for male sex partners, I was completely pre-operative (I had breasts and a vagina), but I looked male by all outward appearances. In the ad, I explained that I was female-to-male, and elaborated more completely to any phone respondents.

I got a lot of responses from men who were primarily straight but said that they were bisexual. In actuality, they may have had only one or two experiences with men. When they came over, I wasn't what they expected, although I had told them on the phone that I looked male and that they might not be attracted to me if they were heterosexual. I think it really flipped them out to be dealing with my genitals in the context of such a masculine presence and appearance.

There were a few men who handled it. One of them said that, after being with me, he realized that being sexual wasn't so much about bodies as about erotic energy between two people, and that to him, I was a man.





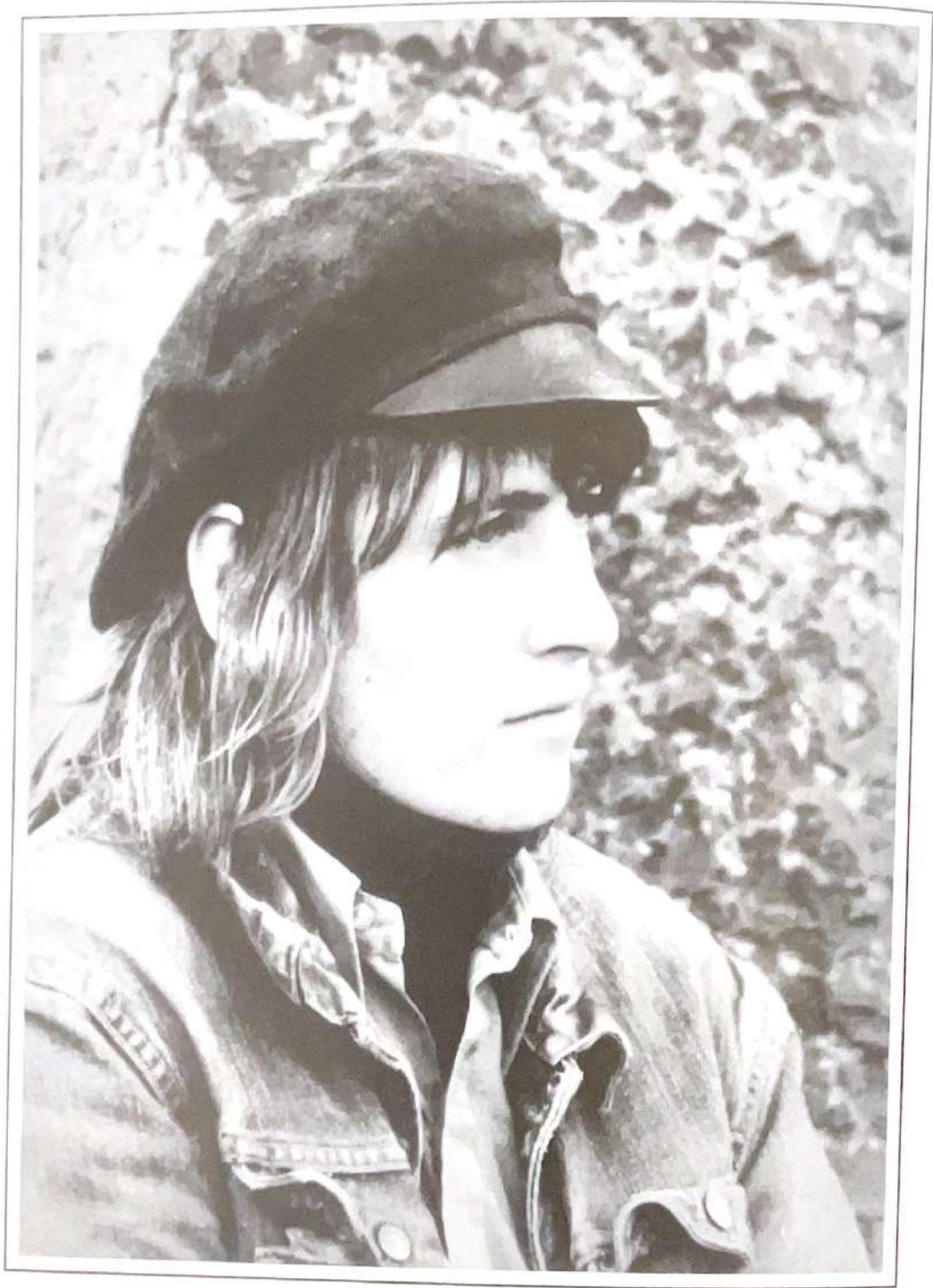
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James Green

It's like descending into Hell and clawing your way back out. People talk about how happy they are when they're just starting hormones, when it's all new. That experience was obliterated for me because, during that time, I lost my relationship of thirteen years, the relationship that I thought was the center of my life and one of unconditional love. Having my children taken away from my daily life was shocking and incredibly depressing.

I was conflicted because, on one hand, I was experiencing a kind of elation as my body was finally taking on the shape I had always wished it to be, but I was also feeling terribly lonely and abandoned. I felt I had lost everything. I was faced with reconstructing every part of my life, and it was extremely challenging—daunting even, and yet there was nothing else I could do but keep going.

After the break-up, I couldn't be intimate with anyone. It was just too painful. It took a couple of years before I could allow myself to be with someone. During the second year, I began to be afraid that no one would ever want me because of what I had done to myself. I was afraid that other people would perceive my body as mutilated. In fact, right after I returned home from having my lower surgery, while I lay there in pain and catheterized, I just started to cry. I was so scared: all I could say was "Who is going to love me? Who is going to love me now?"





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Shadow Morton

I've been a gay man for about the last three years. I'm pretty matter-of-fact about it, and whoever I'm with either accepts it or they don't. Sometimes things can get a little tricky along the way—you know—the whole explanation process brings up lots of questions from potential partners. And some of the people I date get kind of harassed by other gay men who say that I'm not really a guy, so if they continue to date me and have sex with me, it means they're really straight. I always respond to them by saying, "A guy having sex with a guy is straight? If you're worried about being straight, we'll go to bed once and fuck, and then you can tell me if you've been in bed with a guy or a woman." So far, there's been no argument.

Sex is a lot more fun for me now. I'm so much more comfortable. When I'm cruising on the street, I have a sense of predatory power and that I'm in complete control. I enjoy enacting a bad-boy persona and feeling that I'm doing something I'm not supposed to do.

When I cruised as a woman, I always felt uncomfortable. Nine times out of ten, I got my face slapped. The way I approached women never seemed to be the way they liked being approached. Now, I've found my niche. I can be more aggressive with another man, and although I experience lots of intimate and sensual moments with my male partners, when it comes to sex, it's often good old rough rutting. Sometimes that's all I want. I don't want to get up the next morning and have breakfast with this person. I don't want to know his name or phone number. I just want sex. In the women's community, this kind of sexual expression is almost unheard of.

The act of cruising and tricking is not only sexually exhilarating for me but it can also be very validating. It's kind of a recognition thing, you know. These are gay guys, and they wouldn't be tricking with a female. But I know I don't have to go out there to prove anything. As I become more comfortable with who I am as a guy, I don't have to use other people's images and points of view to validate anything about my masculinity. I've already been doing that for myself.





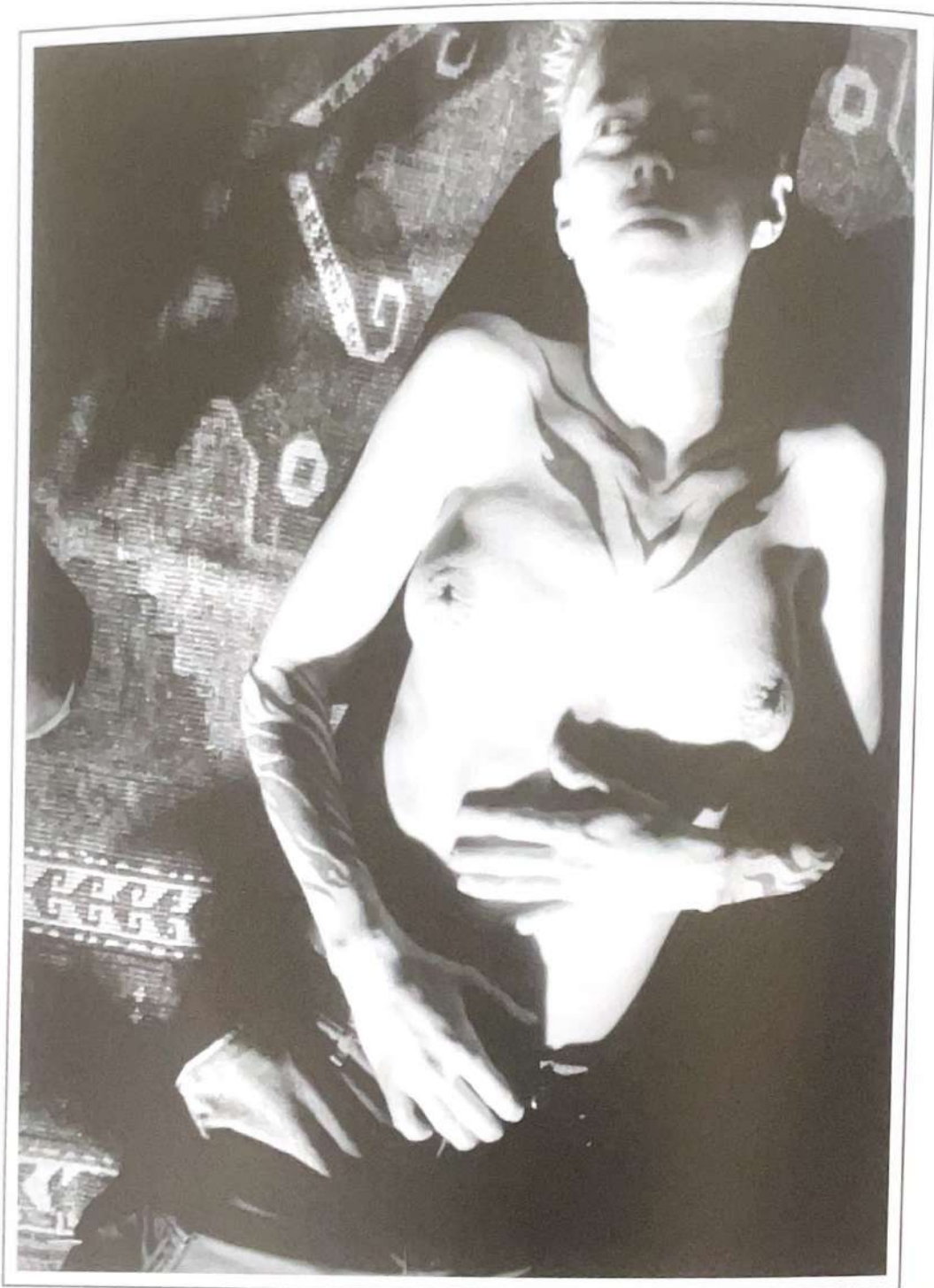
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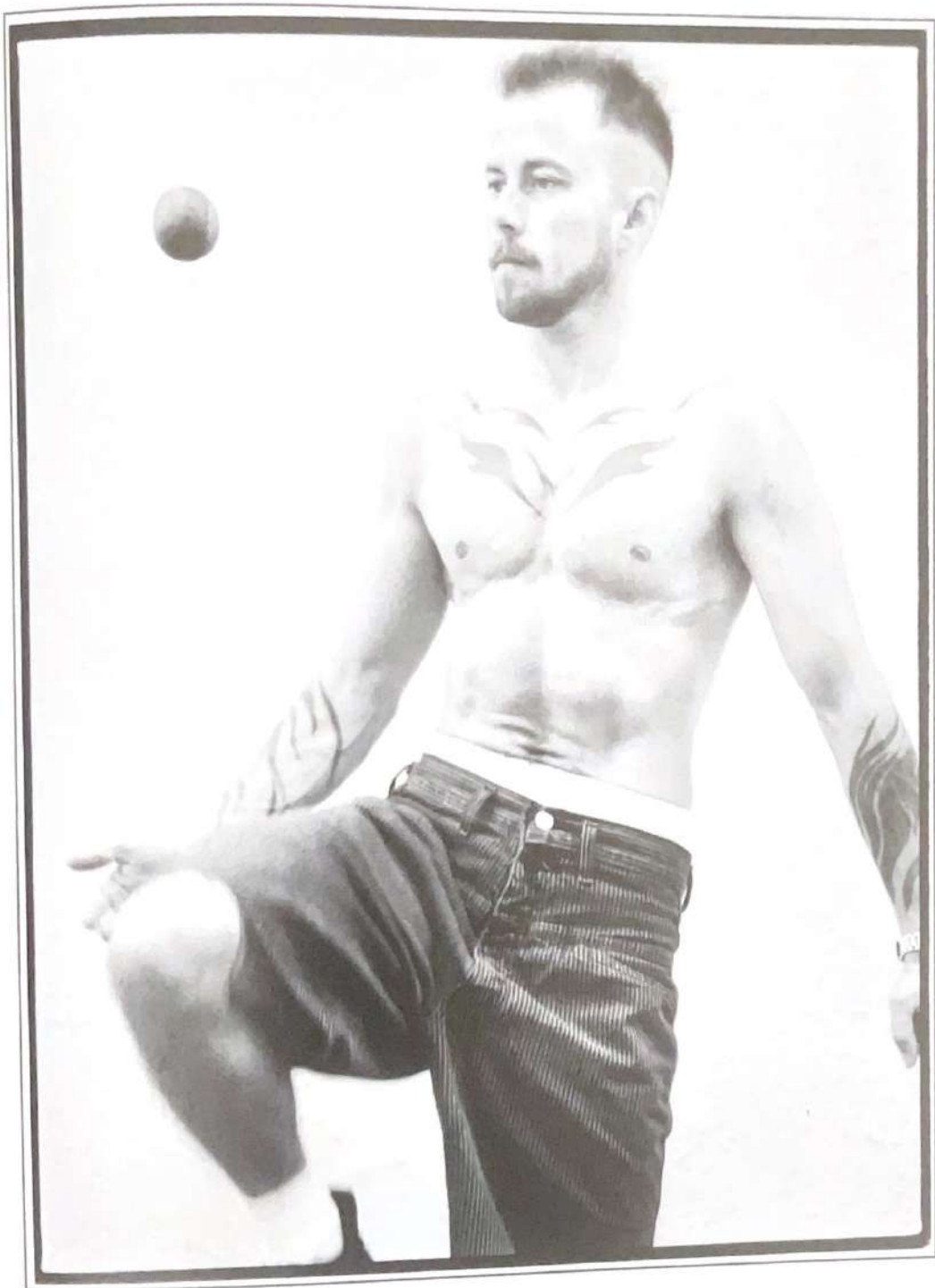
Loren Cameron

So much about my coming to manhood has been about a quest for size. I mean, I really need to be a big man. All of the men I've looked to as role models have been body-builders and athletes. They seem like gods and great beasts to me in their huge and beautiful bodies. I envy them. I want to be like them. They look so virile and invincible.

I know deeply that being a man and having strength isn't at all about my maximum bench press, but it doesn't seem to matter. All I can say is that, as my muscles grow, being five foot three doesn't feel quite so small.

Sometimes I wonder if I'll ever feel big enough. I wonder if I'll ever feel safe in this body.





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Max Valerio

It took a few years for me to comfortably identify as a heterosexual man without qualifying it somehow. After all those years of living in the lesbian community and all that indoctrinated feminism of a certain type, it was really hard to confess my current sexual identity.

If you identify as a heterosexual man, you are automatically seen as sexist in some way. I mean, just looking at a beautiful woman can get you into trouble. When I've said, "Now I understand things like prostitution and pornography because my sex drive has gone up," I've received a lot of criticism. When I say, "I like being a man in relation to a woman because I like feeling stronger," I mean because I have more muscle mass now that I'm on testosterone. But I don't think any less of women for it!

Guys all over the world are apologizing for being men and are trying to create a sense of equality with women. Some say that this friction or war between the sexes is all a socialization thing and that if we could fix society then everything would be okay. But when you take hormones and change your biological sex, you realize it has to be more. There's something profoundly physical going on.





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Duo

Kayt

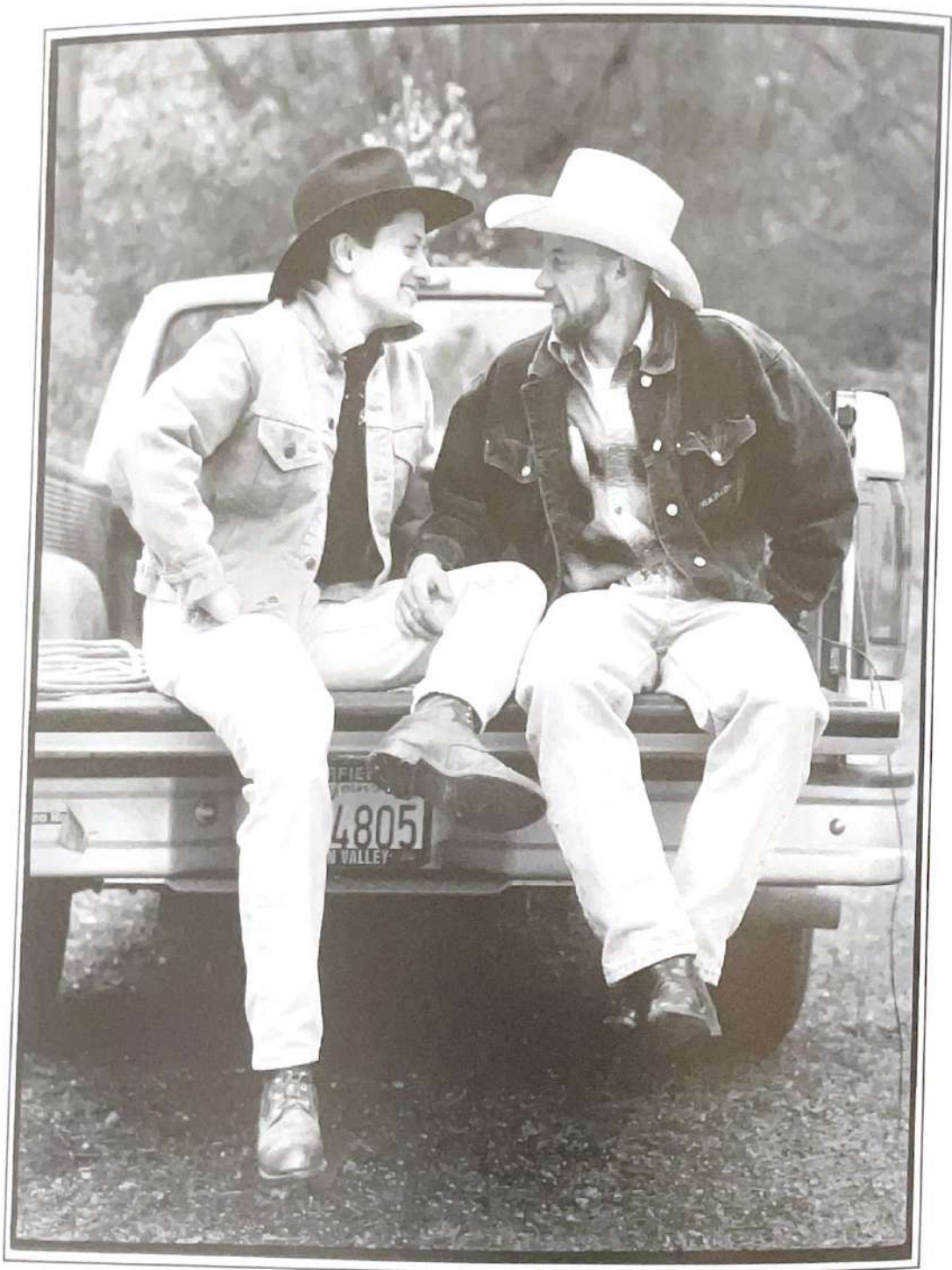
Like many butch dykes, the day I was told to put on a shirt, despite the summer heat, forever marked my passage into the relentlessly gender-divided world.

04

Nonetheless, I was raised as the youngest son, wearing my brother's hand-me-down jeans, T-shirts and work shirts through high school. I was fortunate to have a mother who allowed me great latitude to express masculinity, who in fact said nothing when I decided to wear my brother's clip-on tie to kindergarten with my usual cut-off shorts. (She later believed this "mistake" to be the cause of both my lesbianism and my dysphoria.) I was sent home to change, but I don't recall anyone ever really explaining why. Years later, having more or less finally accepted my female body, I still take my shirt off every chance I get, and I dress, stand and walk much the same as I did back then.

Loren

The first time I saw Kayt was at my art opening. I glimpsed her through the milling crowd as she stood there looking at me with brilliant green eyes. We didn't speak that night; not until a year later did we actually meet. When we introduced ourselves, I remember being impressed by her masculinity. I had never been attracted to someone like her before, but she was handsome, and I recognized something inside her. I saw my reflection in those eyes, and somehow that sameness was soothing.





Kayt

What is most rich and most painful for me about our relationship is facing myself in Loren's image, and facing what my life might have been like had I taken a different path. Many times, the reflection—or lack of reflection—I've seen in Loren has been just too much to face. When I feel this anger and despair, I try to remind myself that beneath these shells, we are both human, searching for love, comfort and self-worth. Despite our struggles, I feel very lucky to have found a partner who can see beyond the body, who really sees me.

Loren

We are so much alike that it's painful when we are different. I have mood swings sometimes, and I suspect that testosterone makes me emotionally distant. Kayt feels that it's harder for me to hear her then, and her anxiety frustrates me; it's difficult for me to recognize the change in my behavior. Growing impatient with her, I begin to lose my temper. I get angry and scared and mean. Arguing, we emotionally attack and deflect one another until we reach an impasse. We shut each other out, retreating into bristling, growling stances. Again, a sameness, but repelling like the wrong ends of two magnets.





Kayt

I have this idea in my head that transsexuals, like artists, are supposed to be the struggling ones, and that their partners are supposed to be the stable, nurturing ones, those unsung heroines/heroes standing behind their new men. But I've always been FTM-identified. Although I sometimes feel bad about not being more traditionally nurturing, more actively supportive of Loren's art or of his difficult journey, I know I offer him another sort of comfort: that "same as" thing, being loved by someone cut from the same cloth, who in many ways feels the same pain and needs the same things. Loren and I are mirrors for one another. That is what our intimacy is all about.

Loren

I can go places with her that I could not go before. Kayt makes it safe for me. She is strong enough to take me there, but I never feel less than. And in turn, offering her own vulnerability, she can invite me all the same. There is a queer familiarity to our love, a trusting likeness.





Kayt

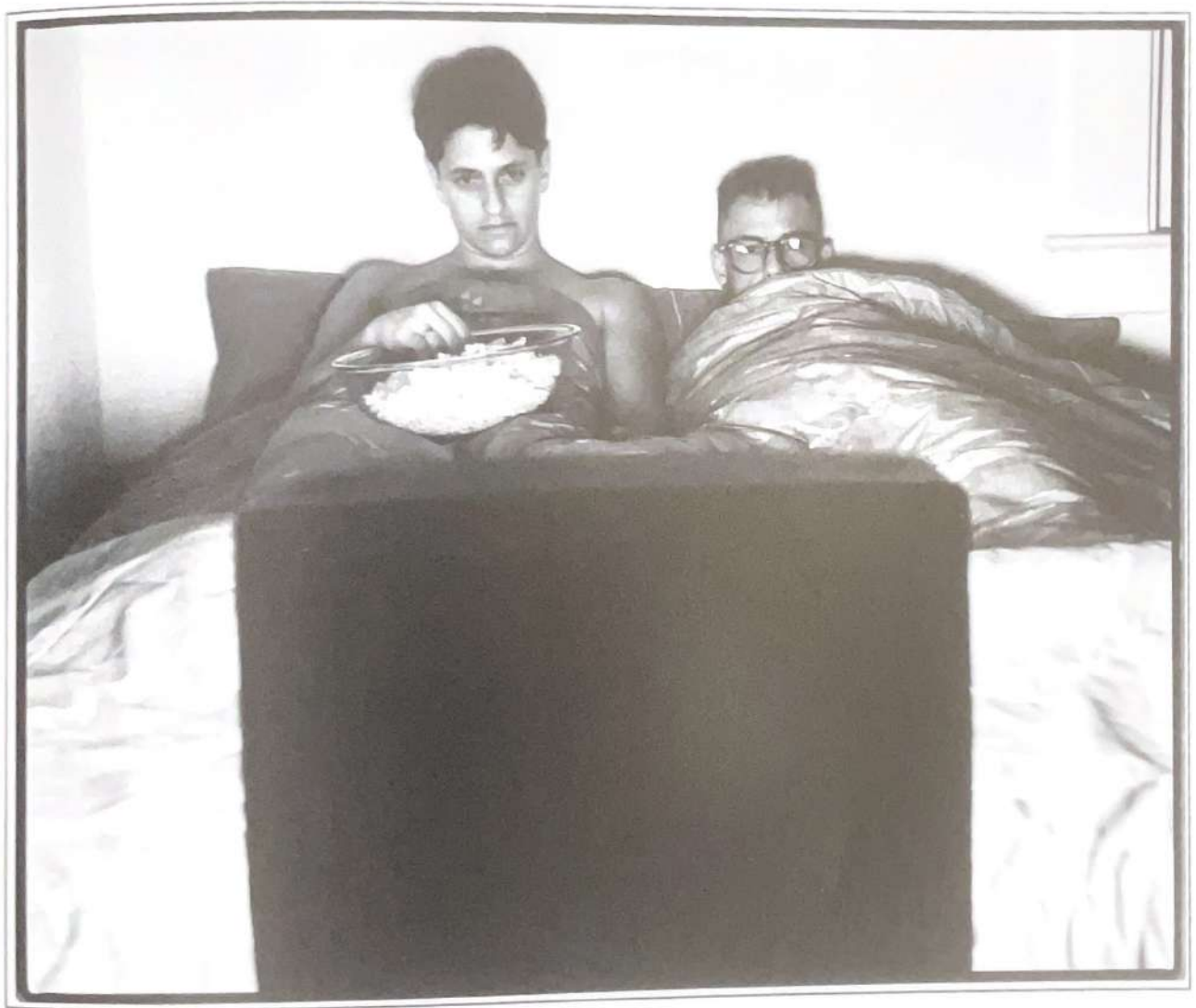
I hang out in the lesbian community, so it's hard to avoid gender pronouns without feeling like I'm hiding something. I don't feel comfortable just saying that I'm with a man. Yet it's such a complex thing to go into when someone simply asks if I have a girlfriend. I mean, they take one look at me and ask, "What's her name?" They don't expect to get a major social education!

I forget though how well my friends know me. In a way, I've been through this before with most of them...butch-on-butcht didn't always go over so well, and then when I showed up in a skirt, they thought it was a joke. Still, I'm always relieved to see the recognition in their eyes when they say "Actually, you know, for you that kinda makes sense..."

Loren

Kayt knows who I am inside. She knows the same discomfort and pain that I have known, but we have arrived at different places to find rest—neither place better than nor really so far from the other. I find so much comfort in her knowing. How could any two people be closer?





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