

VANISHED



Copyright © 2012, Mags Inc./Reluctant Press

Mags, Inc/Reluctant Press TG Publishers

This story is a work of fiction. Any similarity to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental. All situations and events herein presented are fictional, and intended only for the enjoyment of the reader. Neither the author nor the publisher advocate engaging in or attempting to imitate any of the activities or behaviors portrayed.

Persons seeking gender reassignment surgery, hormone therapy or any other medical and/or body-altering process should seek the counsel of a qualified therapist who follows the Benjamin Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorder.

Protect Professional Fiction on the Internet

We need *your* help! We spend several hundred dollars to edit, illustrate and typeset *each story*. It is important, therefore, that everyone works to help keep professional fiction alive on the Net.

The civil penalties for copyright infringement can be severe, including substantial monetary damages, injunctive relief, and liability for attorneys' fees incurred in prosecuting a case. In addition, criminal penalties may be imposed if someone willfully infringes a copyrighted work for commercial advantage or private financial gain.

Mostly, though, we just want to be able to keep offering this service to our authors and our readers.

Report stolen books by using the contact form at reluctantpress.com or call us at 800-359-2116

Thank you.

VANISHED

By Jeri Ellen

FBI agent Susan Parker walked out of the courthouse. As she walked down the steps she couldn't help smile to herself. The jury had been out only twenty two minutes. All of the defendants had been found guilty of the crimes they were accused of and were certain to face long prison terms when the judge sentenced them in thirty days.

After buckling her seatbelt she started the car and turned on the air conditioner full blast. August of 2011 had been the hottest month in many decades. In fact the summer of 2011 had been the hottest one in decades. She pulled out of her parking spot and headed for the Federal Building.

She was looking forward to having a week off. There were a few loose ends to clean up back at her of-

face but then she was going to be gone for a whole week. The drug case that was just finished was one she and several other agents had been working on for over six months. It was a good feeling to know that it was over and they had successfully prosecuted their case to obtain a conviction on all counts.

Arriving at the Federal Building she parked her car and went inside. The elevator doors opened and she walked quickly to the large room where her desk was located. The receptionist looked up at her and smiled.

“Congratulations, I hear they were found guilty on all counts.”

Agent Parker smiled.

“Yes they were. Score one more for the good guys.”

The receptionist handed the agent a package.

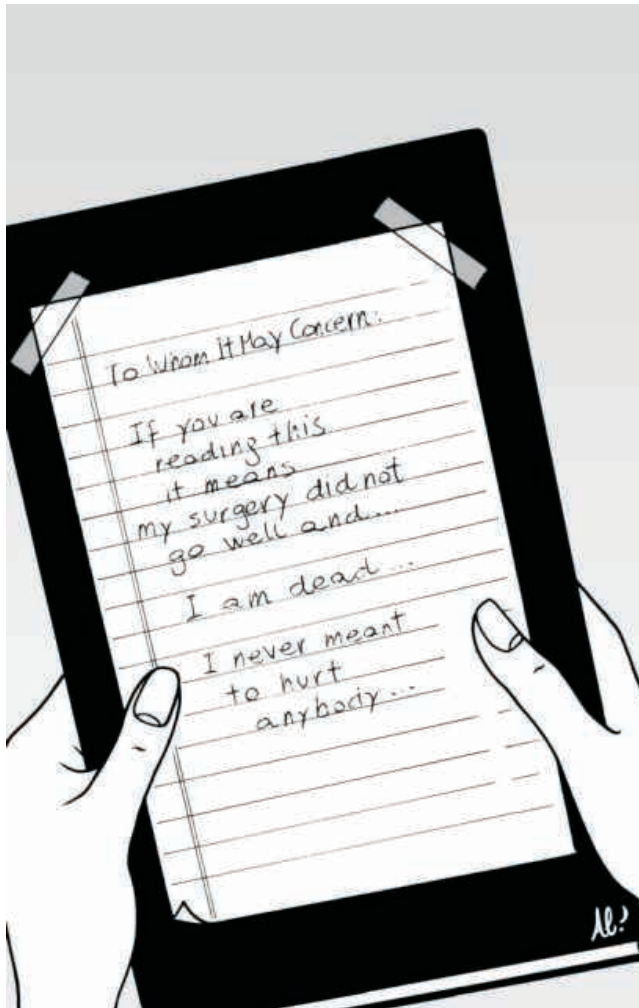
“This came just after lunch. It was been x-rayed and seems to be just a book. The other agents are gone for the day so I guess you are stuck with it.”

Agent Parker took the package from the receptionist and walked to her desk. She had hoped to be out of the office quickly but this might slow her down a little. Setting the package aside she completed some miscellaneous paperwork. When she finished she picked up the package and examined it.

The package was addressed to “Any Agent”, FBI Headquarters, Minneapolis, MN. It was about eighteen inches long, twelve inches wide and two inches thick. The return address was a street in Sacramento, California. Taking the letter opener from her desk drawer she slit the box across one edge and let the contents slide out.

Putting the empty box aside she looked at the contents in front of her. The first item was a clear plastic report cover. Inside were four fifty dollar bills and a Minnesota drivers' license for Donald B. Collins.

The second item was another clear plastic report cover containing a newspaper clipping detailing the skyjacking of an airliner in 1971 by a man whose name on the airline ticket was David B. Evans.



She remembered one of her training instructors at the FBI academy mentioning that the “D. B. Evans” skyjacking case of 1971 had never been solved.

The third item was a ledger book. Taped to the cover was a letter addressed “To Whom It May Concern.”

Paging thru the ledger book Agent Parker discovered it was a handwritten journal. She closed the ledger and read the letter.

To Whom It May Concern:

If you are reading this it means my surgery did not go well and I am dead.

I never meant to hurt anybody. I had been in so much pain for so long I didn’t know where to turn to for help. I know what I did was wrong and I make no excuses for the actions I took. The fact that following my crime I have led a quiet, productive and some may say an exemplary life does not override the fact that I am a criminal and have been a wanted fugitive by the FBI for over forty years.

I am genuinely sorry. Please read the enclosed journal and try to understand the motive for doing what I did. One of the enclosed plastic report covers contains money from the skyjacking. Many stories about me have surfaced since that day and I am sending you this so you may finally close the case.

Sincerely,

Donna Brianna Coulter, aka—Donald B. Crandall,
aka—Donald Brian Collins, aka—David B. Evans.

Agent Parker checked her watch. It was nearly 4pm. She wanted to be home sipping some cold wine. "There is nothing here that cannot wait one week" she thought to herself. After placing the items back in the package she was about to put it in her bottom desk drawer when she changed her mind.

Taking the ledger out of the package she put it in her attaché case. She closed the flap of the package again and returned it to the bottom drawer of her desk. Walking quickly to her car she tossed the case in the seat next to her and drove home.

At home Agent Parker retrieved her mail from the box and went inside her apartment. She set her briefcase on the small desk near the door and booted up her computer. In the kitchen she took a chilled wineglass and a steak from the freezer. After filling the glass half full of red wine she returned to her computer and checked her e-mail.

A short note from her sister was the only one in the inbox and she quickly deleted it. Sitting in the recliner chair she took a sip of the cold wine and thought about the trial that had just concluded. Everything had gone according to plan. It had been a horrendous half year.

Her thoughts went back to her brief case and the ledger. The instructor at the FBI academy had only touched briefly on the unsolved case. She wondered what her fellow agents would say when she told them she might have the case solving evidence in her possession.

After finishing her wine she fixed herself a salad and thawed out the steak in the microwave. She fried up the steak and then heated some leftover hash brown potatoes. Refilling her wine glass she recalled her

mother's advice: "Avoid red meat, chocolate or anything with sugar in it, and alcohol."

Moms don't have to know everything she thought to herself as she bit into the first piece of steak. She hadn't eaten since breakfast. The hearty meal tasted wonderful as she washed it down with another refill of red wine.

That night as she sat in a hot bubble bath she found herself thinking about the ledger in her briefcase. She had planned on reading it the next weekend but it had stayed in the fore front of her thoughts. The possible key to solving a forty year old case was in her desk just a few feet away.

It had been a long case and the relief that it was over in addition to the wine made her sleepy so she went to bed early. As soon as her head hit the pillow she was fast asleep. The alarm shocked her awake at eight am the next morning. She had been asleep almost ten hours. After shutting off the alarm she was tempted to go back to sleep but remembering the ledger she got up.

Breakfast was a frosted roll, orange juice and a cup of coffee. She got dressed, poured herself another cup of coffee, and walked to her desk. Taking the ledger in one hand and her coffee in the other she sat in her recliner chair. She put her coffee on the adjacent stand and re-read the letter taped to the front of the ledger.

She opened the cover and began reading the beautifully hand written words. The ink was very faded but still legible. She stopped reading and began paging thru the book. The further she went the clearer the ink became until the last few pages which appeared to have been written just recently. There was nothing written on the inside of either the front or back cover.

Agent Parker recalled the date of the newspaper story of the skyjacking which had taken place in September of 1971, fifteen years before she had been born. So long ago and so many changes had taken place since then she thought to herself.

Stewardesses had been replaced with flight attendants who were both male and female. Some pilots were now female too. Airplanes were bigger, faster and safer. Women were integrated into many of what had once been male dominated jobs as well as all jobs now were racially and ethnically mixed with equal pay and equal chance at promotions. World peace had yet to become a reality and after 9-11 security measures had been stepped up in all areas of transportation.

When she had entered college she knew she could have her pick of any field and be almost assured of being hired. Unlike the previous generation of women which had been relegated to become teachers, nurses, or secretaries. "Why would I hire you when there is a man out there with a family to support?" was the personnel directors' logic of the times.

Smiling to herself she recalled her mother's words at the backyard party after her graduation from the FBI Academy. "Be thankful for flat shoes and pantsuits" she had said as she extended her legs to display the misshapen toes on both feet that were poking thru her flat heel sandals.

Picking up the cup she took another sip of her coffee. Forty years of changes in business, politics, medicine, and science. It seemed like such a vast gulf was separating her from the beginning of the story she was about to read and the present day.

Staring at the cover letter she once again thought about the journey she was about to embark on that

would take her back in time almost forty years. Someone once said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step so she opened the cover of the ledger book again and began to read the faded blue ink writing.

If this were going to be a book I suppose an appropriate title would be: "Transgender Diary" or perhaps "Diary of a Transgendered Man" In any case this isn't really a book, just a collection of thoughts of a man who made an incredible journey to find himself or perhaps it would be better to say herself.

When I first became aware that I was a person I knew something was wrong with me. I didn't know quite what it was but I knew something wasn't right. My body seemed foreign to me, almost as if I didn't belong in it.

When I took my Saturday night bath there was this thing between my legs that felt like it didn't belong there. I wanted to cut it off so I could walk, run, and sit down normally or what I thought was the normal way I should be doing those things.

My parents dressed me in boys' clothes but they didn't feel right on me. I wanted to wear a dress like my older sister. I liked her shoes better than mine too. They were shiny and had a small bow on the toe while mine were plain brown.

Her long beautiful hair was tied in a pony tail with a pink ribbon while mine was kept short in what my father called a "manly cut". Mom painted my sisters' fingernails pink. Before going to church on Sunday morning she also brushed her cheeks with pink pow-

der and applied pink lipstick to her lips. I wanted to do that too but I was a boy and that was only for girls.

Occasionally when my parents and my sister were gone I would go into my sister's room. I would open her dresser drawer and try on her panties. The soft tri-cot material felt so good against my skin that I didn't want to take them off.

I looked at all the pretty dresses in her closet. I secretly wished that I could try them on and see what I looked like in girl's clothes. I was always very careful to put things back exactly as I had found them. I was terrified of them finding out about my little secret. There was no telling what might happen to me if they discovered me in my sisters' clothes.

Would they humiliate and embarrass me by dressing and making me up, then take me downtown thru several stores so people would see me? Or maybe make me sit on the front porch so neighbors and passers by could see me and walk away laughing? Worse yet would they send me to school next year in my sisters clothes so the other boys could laugh at and pick on me?

I felt ashamed. Why wasn't I normal like the other boys in the neighborhood? Why had God done this to me? If he truly loved all creatures great and small why did he make me like this? One night before going to bed I got on my knees to say my prayers but instead I prayed to God to make me a girl. Then I would be "normal".

When I woke up the next morning I found I was still a boy. God hadn't listened to me. He had abandoned me. I was an outcast. I was all alone in the world with this deep dark secret. Maybe I was crazy. Crazy people were put in something called lunatic asylums.

Would they cure me or just keep me there forever because I wasn't fit to be in "normal" society?

Maybe as I got older these feelings would go away. I wouldn't have this desire to wear my sister's clothes. I would suddenly become the boy I was supposed to be and would never again even think about the way I used to be. I would wear boys' clothes and become a man like my father.

My dad was an excellent athlete and an honorably discharged veteran who after World War II came home to marry and raise a family. I would be a man like him. It was probably just a matter of time until these feelings I had would pass and I would become "normal" like he is.

By the time I started school nothing had changed. I still felt the same way. As I looked around the room at my classmates I felt out of place. I was in the wrong clothes for one thing. I wanted to wear the dresses like the other girls wore. For another, and for the first time, I was felt that I was in the wrong body. If only I could just exchange places with one of the girls maybe that would make me better.

I was a prisoner in my own body. A prisoner just as surely as if I had been put in a cell, its' door locked, and the key thrown away. There seemed to be no escape from this prison and it was a life sentence without the possibility of parole. I appeared to be doomed. Doomed to a life of misery and fear because I wasn't what society said I should be. I wasn't "normal".

Of course I suffered in silence. Who could I talk to about this? It certainly wasn't my parents, my teacher or even the minister of our church. This was a very deep rooted personal thing that I just wasn't willing to risk sharing with anybody.

I was both frustrated and angry. Adults may use drugs or alcohol to deal with their frustrations and anger. As a child of course I had to find some other way to deal with those things. My parents had beer in the fridge and a small amount of liquor under the sink but I knew better than to touch their stuff.

I took out my anger and frustration at recess. Despite my initial awkwardness I applied myself and soon became a fair athlete. I was shorter than most of the boys and didn't have a large frame but soon learned how to swing a baseball bat. In addition with my dad's coaching my catching and throwing skills improved to where I was no longer the last one "chosen" for the phy-ed baseball teams.

Puberty hit before starting Junior High. I woke up one night and found my penis in a state of erection. Looking back it seems more humorous now than it did then. I wasn't sure if it was growing or what was going on but it felt good when I stroked it and soon to my surprise I ejaculated all over the bed. Using toilet paper I wiped myself clean and then urinated. After wiping the sheets as dry as I could I went back to sleep.

From that time on I continued to masturbate. I would often look at the pictures in the many mail order catalogs we got at the house. I would bring myself almost to the point of climax and then relax for a while then bring myself back up to a full state of erection before finally ejaculating into some toilet paper. After wiping myself with a damp washcloth I would flush the paper down the toilet and take the catalogs back downstairs to the rack they were kept in.

I loved the section displaying the bridal and bridesmaid dresses as well as the formal apparel section. The women who were pictured there looked exactly like

the way I wanted to look. Their hair and make up were perfect.

The dresses and gowns fit to perfection. I wanted desperately to wear all those dresses and of course to walk in those high heel shoes. In addition they all were perfectly accessorized from their earrings to their gloves and handbags. They were all a perfect picture of femininity.

I closed my eyes and pictured myself as being one of them. Maybe someday I could extricate myself from this prison I was in and find a way to transform myself into one of those girls in the catalogs. I would be looked up to and admired. I would become successful and desirable. I would have a wonderful life because now I was “normal”

Unfortunately those dreams were always short lived. One look in the mirror and I knew that it was going to be a serious undertaking. There is an old saying “you can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear.” I wasn’t a sow’s ear by any means but I was never going to be described as a “good looking kid” either. Maybe my looks too would change in time.

The overcrowded Junior High school was a nightmare. The kids were all pushing and shoving to get to and from their lockers and classrooms. I wasn’t good enough for the freshman baseball team so I was relegated to one of the phy-ed teams.

My feelings made me about as miserable as I could be. On top of that I was jammed in with these other kids almost like I was one of a herd of cattle. I was not very outgoing and as a result kept pretty much to myself. Teachers labeled me as somewhat shy and reserved.

As much as I dreaded having to give a short speech in front of the class I did it. Like some of the kids I hardly slept much the night before the day my speech was due but after giving it I felt better and that night I slept like log.

Future assignments like that became easier as I had gained some measure of self confidence, something a few other kids didn't obtain. One student swallowed a tranquilizer pill from his mother's prescription bottle while another brought an ounce of vodka to drink one hour before class time to help him relax.

I sometimes wondered about the tough jocks that could slam into somebody with out fear yet were almost shaking visibly as they walked to the front of the class to give their speech. In some senses I guess that made me even with them though it was little consolation as they were always popular with girls and I wasn't.

I can honestly say that I never felt attracted to boys. I liked being around girls. It was just that I guess I felt more comfortable around them. They weren't noisy, rowdy, or loud. Most of them were smart and I enjoyed a conversation with them that didn't involve football or the opposite sex. As one boy put it about one of the girls in the class "she had a great set of tits."

In addition I seemed to be very conscious of the way the girls dressed or fixed their hair. I kept thinking to myself that if I were a girl I would never wear that or fix my hair that way. She is wearing too much lipstick or it was the wrong shade for her to be wearing. Why aren't her nails longer and polished with pink nail polish instead of bright red? Why are some girls chewing their nails off to the very end?

When the teachers lecture would drone on I would sometimes close my eyes and imagine myself wearing a certain skirt or blouse that I saw on a classmate. Underneath of course I would be wearing a bra and panties. I would have dozens of sets in pastels with ruffles on the back but half of them would be pink, my favorite color.

My heart wasn't in school. My parents were concerned as they felt I was capable of earning better grades and of course I was. While I was never suicidal I didn't feel I had much reason to live unlike the other kids who in my estimation of course were "normal".

I was getting passing grades but below expectations. I had more trouble with shop courses than anything else. My manual dexterity had improved but I didn't care to learn about the power equipment in woodshop or trying to figure out how to draw an object in three views on the drafting board with a T square and a 45-90.

Entering my sophomore year I was a perfect definition of "unmotivated". I knew the importance of good grades but because I was struggling with my "feelings of femininity" I was having trouble seeing my way clear to having a meaningful life.

I did enjoy the electricity and radio classes. I managed to build my own radio from a kit and was pleased that I finally had accomplished something on my own. The instructor got in touch with a HAM radio operator and one night a week several of us learned the Morse Code. Unfortunately my parents couldn't afford to buy some equipment so I wasn't able to pursue that any further.

It wouldn't have mattered anyway I guess. My dad was a great outdoorsman. He loved to fish and hunt. I would go with him occasionally but never liked catching fish. I was a little intimidated by skewering a wig-gling worm or a flopping minnow on a hook.

Some weekends I brought home extra books and used homework as an excuse not to go with him. He never questioned it. He had a limited amount of education himself so he was only to glad to see his son pay attention to his schoolwork.

On my twelfth birthday I received a .22 caliber rifle for a Christmas present. I had yet to accompany him when he went hunting with one or more of his friends. I didn't really care for guns anyway but I learned to shoot under his expert tutelage. Despite being able to hit the bulls' eye of a paper target I wondered if I was capable of shooting and killing an animal.

By the end of my junior year I was still very miserable. I had grown taller and had filled out some. I was no longer able to try on my sisters' or my mom's lingerie and clothing. Once I had dressed completely in my sisters clothes but the image in the mirror of a boy in an ill fitting dress was not a pretty one and I stopped doing it. Instead I paged thru the mail order catalogs and fantasized about how I would like to be changed into one of the very feminine images I saw displayed there.

As much as I enjoyed the company of my female classmates I didn't have a drivers' license yet. In addition the added cost of insuring me on my dad's policy made it prohibitive. Having no money there was no way I was going to ask a girl to the prom. I was left to fantasize about dancing with and later kissing a girl. I wanted to do both of course because that was "normal". That was what boys did.

There were two proms each year, a junior and a senior prom. When my sister brought home her dress and shoes I was very envious. She looked terrific as she modeled it in front of my dad and me. I desperately wanted a dress of my own of course so I suffered in silence.

Halfway thru my senior year I met with a career counselor after the Christmas break. I didn't have the faintest idea of what to do with my life. The deep dark secret I was keeping from everybody was apparently going to be with me for the rest of my life and I was still having trouble coping with it. It wasn't that I wanted to die but what kind of career could I possibly carve out for myself with this "thing" inside of me?

The counselor and I discussed both college and trade schools. This was 1965. There was a draft and rather than risk being drafted and having no say as to what type of military occupation I might be assigned to I decided to enter the military right away. With my military service behind me I would have the GI bill to help school expenses whatever I did choose. The counselor agreed and we left it at that.

In February I spoke with only the Air Force and Navy recruiters. I didn't want any part of the Army or Marines as the only thing I could think of was being sent into combat and living in a foxhole. I finally chose the Air Force. I wasn't sure exactly why.

There was a conflict in Vietnam and if it escalated into a war I sure didn't want to be on the ground and ships sink so I thought that serving in the Air Force would be "cleaner" in a certain sense. I wasn't sure if I was being selfish or maybe just out of a sense of self preservation.

In May I took the required battery of tests, passed all of them and was given a report date for an induction physical and basic training. That month was long. I couldn't help but feel a little intimidated but the prospect of several years of a strict disciplined environment to say nothing of the fact that it was a very "manly" environment. But I had to do it as I certainly didn't want to be a "draft dodger."

I graduated high school on the same day I turned 18. My dad bought some beer and we had a small graduation party at home. My sister had graduated two years before me and was working her way thru college several hundred miles away and couldn't be there.

My parents gave me a shave kit for a graduation present. I would need it when I went to basic even though I had yet to start shaving. I had two weeks before reporting for active duty. I shaved every night and managed to cut myself only once.

After the induction physical I was shipped to Texas for basic. It was quite an experience. A lot of screaming and yelling at us for no apparent reason inter spiced with military indoctrination. One week before my company finished boot camp I went to classification.

The sergeant sitting across from me explained the various schools that he felt I was not only qualified for but would be good at. Since I really didn't have the foggiest idea what I wanted to do in life myself I had to trust his judgment about where I would best fit in to the needs of the U. S. Air Force.

Following graduation from basic training I went home on two weeks leave before I reported to the Air Cargo Supply School in Texas. Despite arriving in early September I found Texas to be very hot. I learned about

the new supply system using IBM punched cards to control inventory and shipments of supplies.

After my training I was stationed at an Air Force base nearby. There was increased activity as the war in Vietnam was heating up and more and more servicemen were being sent there. I found myself not only learning about acquisition and disbursement of supplies but on occasion helped load the cargo aircraft and as a result became a little familiar with the different types of both military and civilian aircraft on the base.

I was still having trouble resolving my feelings. I did some sight seeing on my days off and socialized at the local watering holes with some of the other guys in my unit. I lost my virginity one weekend to a half drunk waitress who worked at a restaurant not far from the base. I had become a man in a sense though I didn't feel very manly.

The base library had provided a good refuge for me. I would sit with a copy of Popular Mechanics or Popular Science in my lap while glancing over at the women's fashion magazines that were displayed on the rack in front of me.

It was a real conundrum. Here I was a male, serving my country, working and socializing with other males yet trying to keep my deep feelings of femininity suppressed as I acted out my charade. I sometimes felt like I was going to go crazy.

The base gym was a good outlet for my frustrations. I did some running and weight lifting but of course the inner feelings I had remained the same. There were times when I wondered if I was going to make it thru my military service or life either. I knew when I got out I was going to have find some way to resolve this or my life would be one very large train wreck.

I was promoted twice and then with fourteen months left I got the bad news. I would be going to an Air Force base in Danang, South Vietnam for my last tour of duty. When I got the news I was a little surprised as I thought I would spend the rest of my tour where I was.

After spending all my accrued leave at home I reported to a west coast Air Force base for transportation overseas. As I sat there waiting for my flight to board I suddenly thought about the prospect of being killed or badly wounded.

It was something that hadn't occurred to me before, except for that one time when during out processing the clerk asked me where I wanted the body sent. I was about to ask what body he was talking about when it dawned on me that it was my dead body he was referring to.

Finally it was time to board my flight along with about two hundred other guys. As we were herded on the plane I momentarily saw us as a plane load of sheep headed for the slaughterhouse. That sounds bad I guess but we were headed for a war zone.

The flight was much longer than expected. We stopped in Hawaii for refueling. While backing up the fuel truck punched a small hole in the fuselage. We were all given a five dollar credit at an airport restaurant until repairs were finished. I was looking forward to a steak dinner when I discovered things in Hawaii were more expensive than they were stateside. A burger, fries, lettuce salad and a soft drink was \$3.95. I skipped desert.

The flight finally took off and was much longer than usual as we encountered headwinds that slowed us down considerably. It had been about two hours to

Hawaii and it should have been about ten hours to Vietnam. Instead it was twelve hours to Okinawa. We finally deplaned and stretched our legs. The short flight to Danang, RVN was not short enough.

I had spent the better part of an entire day in this aluminum tube hurtling thru the air at six hundred miles an hour except when we encountered two hundred mile an hour headwinds. Imagine you and two hundred other people stuck in a tube for that amount of time. Even though we landed in a war zone I was very glad to get off that plane.

It was pitch black when we landed. Before getting off the aircraft we all had to sign a customs declaration that we were not bringing any contraband or other illegal stuff into the country. I tried to think of what would be dangerous to bring here when the real danger was out there somewhere just waiting for the right time to kill us all.

When I exited the aircraft I was hit by a blast of warm, humid air. In addition to the sharp contrast in temperature from the air conditioned environment of the jet liner there was a horrible smell in the air. I got my gear and waited near some small buildings to board one of several man-haul trucks. These were like the cattle semi trucks you see on the highway but used to haul people.

Several Vietnamese women were squatted down sweeping up stuff around the buildings. One of them went over to a small ditch around the building, dropped her pants and crapped right in front of us. I wondered just what kind of a place I had come to. We were here trying to save these people from communist aggression and they didn't even have toilets.

With the other Air Force personnel I boarded one of these semi trucks. On the front of one of the trucks was a sign that read: "Welcome To Where The Action Is", a title from a popular TV show at the time.

As the loaded trucks moved away from the flight line one of drivers made the truck back fire which scared the crap out of most of us but later I found out the drivers do this on purpose to sort of "welcome" us to the combat zone.

The truck I was on picked up some speed and as we passed several encampments I saw shadowy figures in helmets and frag jackets at the entrances. On top of the sand bags around the entrance were belts of machine gun ammunition. In the distance there were flares going off. I had a sinking feeling in my stomach as we went along. This wasn't a fucking John Wayne movie, this was the real deal. I wasn't dreaming. I was in a real live war zone.

The truck stopped and an officer with a clipboard called out names. I was one of them. I followed the rest of the men and soon found myself billeted at the opposite end of the base where we had first boarded the trucks. There was an occasional crackle of machine gun fire in the distance and there was the constant roar of jets and other aircraft taking off and landing. I did not sleep well that night.

I adjusted quickly to the routine. I worked longer hours than I had at the base in Texas but by keeping busy the time went by faster. You would still hear explosions in the distance and the presence of dog handlers around the edge of the base was a constant reminder that this was indeed a place where anything could happen, anywhere and at any time.

In July of 1967 all hell broke loose. One minute everything was normal, if you could say that about being in a war zone and the next everything was blowing up. The noise was incredible. A thousand Fourth of July Firecrackers combined into one bang each time a rocket exploded.

As I was leaving my billet for a sand bagged dug-out shelter I heard an unusual noise in the air and gave the airman ahead of me a push to the ground. There was the sound of metal piercing metal as we hit the dirt followed by the loudest explosion I ever heard.

Hours later when we clambered out of the dugout and surveyed the damaged Quonset hut there was a line of holes in the side and one large one where the airman had been standing. He looked at the hole and then at me. Sticking out his hand he said solemnly "I owe you one".

Things finally got back to normal over the next few months. Boredom had set back in and our work became routine again. The weather cooled off as the monsoon season came. I spent a week in Japan on R&R. When I returned Vietnam seemed almost cold compared to the hot country I had left. Guys had jackets on. It may sound crazy but the difference between temperatures of over a hundred degrees for several months and temperatures of 70-80 was enough of a drop to make it feel cold.

Just before Christmas I was outside the building when the mail chopper went overhead. Santa was standing in the open door with a mail bag next to him and one hand on a .50 caliber machine gun. Don't fuck with Santa or he will chop you into hamburger with that .50 cal. It was a very quiet Christmas and New Years. "God bless us everyone" I thought to myself.

I should have kept my fingers crossed I guess. I had just about three months left in country when the '68 TET offensive began. If I thought the attack in July was bad, this was worse because the attacks came all over the country. It was very bad in Saigon and north of here in Hue.

When it was finally over we all tried to relax if that was ever going to be possible again. We learned the enemy had suffered very high casualties which led us to believe the war would be over soon. Judging by the number of medivac choppers coming into Danang hospital I wasn't so sure.

This kind of a war was so different from the one my dad had fought in. His war had lines. It was a we-they type of war as opposed to here where we never knew where the enemy was until it was too late. The cartoon character POGO said it best: "We have met the enemy and he is us." The enemy was all around us and we had no clue where or when he might pop up to kill us.

There was not a lot of time to think about other things when you are in a war. Keeping busy is the best thing. I hadn't really thought much about my feelings while I was in country. I would be leaving here in a couple of months and wondered just what I was going to do when I got out of the service, that is of course if I lived long enough. A popular record spoke for all of us: "We got to get out of this place, if it is the last thing we ever do".

Finally leaving this place was just a few days away. I finished the out processing and on a bright sun shiny morning I said my good byes and boarded a Continental Airlines jet. I was going "back to the world" as we used to say.

As soon as the wheels of the jet left the ground I began feeling better already. Looking outside I saw the green countryside fall away and be replaced with the beautiful blue Pacific Ocean. The war was now somebody else's problem. I was going home. Looking down at my groin I wondered what I was going to do now, both career wise and to try to resolve this "conundrum" I was in.

The flight was uneventful. I was out processed quickly and efficiently. During the week I was disturbed to find many demonstrations going on against the war and the draft. Obviously I had no choice about going there since I was already in the service. With duffel bag and discharge papers in hand I headed for the airport.

Arriving home everyone was glad to see me. My sister would be home in another week with her College degree. She was going to be a teacher and wanted to return for her Masters before seeking a job. I was very happy for her as I knew she was going to be a very good teacher.

What I was going to do was an entirely different matter. I had deposited my mustering out pay in the bank. I wasn't sure about using the GI Bill to jump right into school. The local trade school was much cheaper than college but there wasn't much of anything that piqued my interest. Maybe the best thing to do would be to get out into the labor force and work awhile before deciding what to do.

I took Drivers' Ed and got my license. I talked with a couple of temporary labor agencies and found some jobs that were on the bus line. I started working nights driving forklift for a small printing company a few miles north of where I lived. It was mindless work but I

was living at home and banking most of my paychecks. At minimum wage it would be awhile before I could buy a car.

The main library didn't have much information about sex changes or transvestites. I felt the only option I had was to see a psychiatrist. I had reservations about that since once you did something like that and you were ever found out you were pretty much labeled in the public's eye as "crazy". It was also some-thing that would forever brand you in the workplace, essentially freezing you at whatever level you were at leaving you with no hope for advancement there or anywhere else either for that matter.

I had been working just short of two years when a national magazine had an article about a man who had changed his sex. I remembered getting back on the plane in Hawaii to find the airman seated next to me and several others looking at some glossy magazine with a graphic picture of a man with a surgically created cavity between his legs. Another picture showed the beautiful woman he had become. There was some laughter and crass remarks.

It scared me to think of what may be in store for me if that's what was wrong with me. It was hard to look at the picture of the man and then the woman he had become without marveling at how good he looked. At the end of the article was the address of a foundation in Louisiana to write to for more information. I wrote immediately and couldn't wait for the reply.

A month passed and there was still no answer from the foundation. I felt a little panicky. Was this a scam to get names for a mailing list, for blackmail, or perhaps some conspiracy to identify what most of society at

that time considered a bunch of freaks? I was more than a little worried.

Two more weeks went by until I received a plain brown envelope in the mail. Inside was a letter apologizing for the delay in sending the enclosed materials. It said "additional secretaries had to be employed to handle the volume of mail".

This meant that the mail response wasn't a handful of letters brought by the postal carrier. The mail was apparently coming in by the bagful. This gave me a great sense of relief because if that were true then obviously I was not alone by any means. I was one of thousands of other men with feelings like mine.

The enclosed pamphlets made interesting and informative reading. They led me to read books by Harry Benjamin and Drs. Money and Green from John Hopkins hospital. In addition I found autobiographies by Christine Jorgenson and Rene Richards.

Further investigations revealed an actor, a British mountain climber and a noted columnist for a major city newspaper who not only had served in Vietnam but rode with the cops and firefighters in his home city. It seems as if I had uncovered a hidden cache of people very much like myself. An underground, hidden from the public, group of people who were all harboring the same deep, dark secret.

Now there seems to be a bit of a light in that very dark existence that we all felt we were trapped in and forced to spend the rest of our lives in. Daylight was coming for sure. I wondered if it would come soon enough to help me. I continued to work and save my money.

There had been several airline hijackings in the news. These were done to get to the island nation of Cuba. A comedian joked that the government should offer one flight a week to Cuba to anyone who wanted to leave.

I began thinking about that. If I got a gun and a disguise, hijack the plane, demand money and a couple of parachutes, let the passengers go and then jump out of the plane over northern Minnesota, meet with someone who would be unaware of what I had done, I could possibly get away with enough money to resolve my conundrum. The more I thought about it the more plausible the idea became.

At work one of the new men was Richard Washington, the black man whose life I had saved in Vietnam. He had left the country several months before me and like me he had been bumming around between jobs not knowing what to do. We reminisced on our breaks. It then dawned on me that he was the one guy I knew I could trust. I began to think more seriously about the hijacking.

I obtained flight schedules from several airlines. There was a small local airline with short flights in and around a three state area. Central States airlines would be a perfect choice since I could bail out only a short distance after taking off. They had the type of aircraft with a boarding ladder that lowered from the tail making a parachute exit very easy. I noted the flights that left the Twin Cities airport after dark.

Saturday morning I watched my dad set aside a couple of road flares while he cleaned out the trunk of his car. I decided to tape some road flares together and add some electrical wiring to a toggle switch to look

like a bomb rather than buy a gun and risk somebody trying to wrestle it away from me.

On my next day off I drove north of the Twin Cities looking at several small towns and the surrounding countryside that would be along the approximate flight path of the jet I would be hijacking. I stayed until long after dark to listen for flights going over head and noted the times. I now knew the approximate times where these flights would be within minutes of taking off.

After figuring in the time for my fall from the plane I could give Richard a time and place to be to pick me up. I became excited as I saw my plan, which I had laid out much like a military operation, begin to make more and more sense. For a brief instant I thought about a local cops' remark that had been printed in the paper: "All criminals have great plans, that's why the prisons are full."

The next part of the plan was to figure out what I was going to do after the hijacking, assuming of course that I got away with it and didn't get hurt on landing and Richard was there to pick me up at the designated meeting point.

I had to lay low for awhile. I would continue working as if nothing had happened. The second part of my plan would have to wait. It would require me to re-locate where I would find doctors who were knowledgeable about my condition to treat me and prescribe hormones for my transition.

Since leaving the military I had not cross dressed at all. My sister was gone and I had outgrown my mother's clothing. I was not a large man by any means but my mom and sister had been short, small framed

women. I continued to read catalogs and fantasize about how I would look as a woman.

Another winter passed and with the warmth of spring came a renewed interest or perhaps “passion” would be a better word for my plan. I had tried to find out information about changing identities. There was very little out there even at the main downtown library.

I couldn't see my self at the DMV or Social Security Bureau explaining that I needed to change my records because I was now a woman instead of a man. That was certain to do more than raise their eyebrows. Then trying to explain to family members and friends would be even worse. I thought the best thing for me to do was to find a way to disappear entirely.

When I had returned from Vietnam mom had remarked about how I had lost weight. Despite home cooking and being able to relax I knew I had to stay slim and trim for what lay ahead. I had begun to work out within a month of being home and had just eaten a little less than I usually had done. I was not only in good health but good physical shape as well. I had let my hair grow longer too as was the style for men at that time. While my dad still sported his crew cut he never said anything to me.

California had always been known as a fairly liberal and open minded place. The weather there was always nice so it seemed to be the ideal place for me to relocate. I was still riding the bus to work. I didn't want to buy a car until I had re-located.

I was still stuck as to what to do about an identity. I hadn't a clue as to how to go about getting a false one and then after transitioning to replace that with a feminine one. It was like I was going to have to be another

man, then a woman leaving my original identity behind. This had me concerned a lot more that trying to get away with a skyjacking or not getting away with it and having to spend time in prison for a federal offense.

One night at work Richard and I were discussing a news story about a couple of men who had managed to obtain different identities before robbing a bank. When I shook my head and asked how they could do that Richard looked me right in the eye and said: "If you ever need something like that for any reason here is someone who can help you". He wrote a name and phone number on a napkin and handed it to me. I simply nodded as I said "thanks" and we went back to work.

Things were coming to a head. My feelings seemed to be getting stronger and I spent more and more time thinking about the transition I was going to be making as well as my plan to achieve it. I felt I couldn't spend any more time thinking about it. I had to act soon and the sooner the better.

I stopped at a theatrical supply store near the university. I bought a skull cap, beard and a pair of black plastic glasses with clear glass lenses. After buying a toggle switch and a short length of wiring at an electronics store I stopped at an automotive supply store and bought a half dozen road flares.

Late that night I rigged it up and using duct tape I affixed my "bomb" to an old vest of my dads that had been in my closet. I put the rigged up vest in the bottom drawer of my dresser under some old clothes. I had to drink several beers before I felt relaxed enough to go to bed.