

by Deirdre McCloskey

# Transformation

**N**ot long ago I was a man, married 30 years, a professor of economics and history, pleased to be at Iowa. Now I am a woman, and I'm even more pleased to be at Iowa. The change is something I've wanted since I was 11. I would go to sleep praying to wake up with two wishes fulfilled: to stop stuttering and to be a girl. At 54, after a good life as a man, I've gotten one of my wishes.

Of course the change is not 100 percent. My chromosomes can't change; my voice remains male, though there are operations and exercises that help. Most important, I can't ever have had the life of a woman up to age 54. We are our memories, and mine are those of a man. But I can live the rest of my life as a 90 percent woman, with hair length and facial structures that give me the appearance of someone born female. I don't cause a riot when I walk through the Old Capitol Mall. My colleagues are finding it easier and easier to say "she." And I can gradually acquire the memories from an older

woman's life. Truthfully, I'm beginning to forget what it's like to be a man. Why do they forget birthdays so easily?

"Transsexuality" is not quite as crazy as it seems. Two women pilots flying for United are former men. I know a decorated San Francisco policeman who was a decorated San Francisco policewoman until four years ago. At my electrologist's office the other day, I met a businessman, a retired CEO of a Fortune 500 company, who is on his way to becoming a retired businesswoman. I know quite a few professors here and there who are trans-

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sexuals: a historian at Swarthmore, a political scientist at the University of Washington, a sociologist at Cal Berkeley, a mathematician at Cal State. Real people with real lives.

What has surprised me is how easily people have adjusted. My undergraduate students just don't seem to care. It's my work in the classroom that concerns them, not my gender. One less man professor,

one more woman professor. Big deal! I do find I react to them, and they to me, as a woman. When they came in with concerns about a tough exam I gave the other day, I found myself naturally acting like Aunt Deirdre rather than Uncle Donald: more sympathetic and understanding, but no lower in standards.

The students take it with good humor. To raise money, the student club at the business college made a T-shirt listing the Ten Top Reasons to Be a Business Major at Iowa. Number two, second from the top, says "Diversity—We have Professor McCloskey." When they presented me with a T-shirt, I gave them a kiss.

My colleagues have responded just fine. The women have been wonderful. When I came out to a group at lunch, be-

fore going full-time as Deirdre, they were stunned. Lola Lopes, a colleague, had to leave for another meeting. As she stood to go she said, "I have only one thing to say: welcome!" Welcome, that sweetest of words, has been on the lips of many women.

It's harder on the men, since it's their tribe I'm leaving. But they have been gallant and good. A recent graduate of the MBA program sat beside me on a plane the other day. After 15 minutes of chatting, he put two and two together: economics professor, tall, husky voice (at best). "I think I know who I'm talking to," he said. And then he went out of his way to help me deal with getting into my car at the airport, my "lost" keys turning up...in the ignition.

The Iowa response is typified by Gary Fethke, dean of the business school. After I told him, and after he'd picked his jaw up off the floor, he went into a comedy routine. "Thank God...I thought you were going to say you'd turned socialist! And this is great for affirmative action—up one, down another! And, wait: I can cut your salary as a woman by a third!" Very funny.

But then he said, "That's a strange thing to do. How can I help?" And he did. It's the Iowa way: tolerance, humor, and grace. □

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historian and critic of the field. Until October 1995, she was Donald.