

The Story of Stephanie Anne Lloyd

Meeting Stephanie today, a glamorous and self-assured wife and business woman, it's hard to imagine the confused little boy from St Albans she had once been all those years ago.

It may sound like an old cliché - but when it comes to transvestites and transsexuals, it really does take one to know one.

Unless you yourself have experienced the mental confusion of being a boy who wants to be a girl - full-time or part-time - you really haven't a clue what it's all about.

Doctors and psychiatrists might discuss it, daytime television presenters may discuss it, your wife or girlfriend might go along with it. But in truth, they can never really know how it feels.

Stephanie Anne Lloyd does know, simply because she was a boy who grew to be a woman. She doesn't know why she was like that any more than you or I do - it's just the hand we were dealt.

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For Stephanie, it was a particularly tricky hand. Her previous male self - Keith Hull - came from a strictly religious background, was married with children he adored, and had a highly paid successful career in front of him. If he could just have lived his life "normally" as a man, he would have had it made.

But, for some reason he couldn't understand, Keith had always just known he wasn't like other boys - he grew to look like a man and act like a man, but acting the part was the closest he could get. Inside, under the protective shell he had created for the sake of normality, was the soul of a woman.

Many of you reading this might recognise his dilemma. Should Keith have carried on through life trying to play the role his parents and family expected, or should he have been true to his inner self - at whatever cost that could bring? Keith ultimately chose truth and took the path to becoming Stephanie - although the cost proved higher than even he could

ever have imagined.

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The affluent, highly respected family man found himself overnight tainted as an outcast. She suffered savage publicity, was shunned by her parents, her wife, her children and her friends. She lost her home, her job, and all the money she had. Some things, however, did remain. Her indomitable spirit and defiance of defeat. Stephanie was determined to put her experience, however painful it might have been for her, to some good use.

The result was Transformation, and a whole new beginning not only for Stephanie, but for TVs and TSs throughout the UK. Transformation was the very first business in the country to openly promote a specialist service for transvestites. Stephanie opened the closet door for us all.

Meeting Stephanie today, a glamorous and self-assured wife and business woman, it's hard to imagine the confused little boy from St Albans she had once been all those years ago. Like so many transsexuals, Stephanie can't put her finger on when she first realised she was different to her boyhood pals, but she will never forget the recurring dream that filled her nights from the age of five. A dream in which the young Keith was kidnapped and turned into a girl by a couple who had lost their daughter, and who wanted him to take her place.

By the age of seven Keith had discovered the dream could cross into reality, if only occasionally, in dressing-up sessions with his friends. They put on their own private plays, with Keith taking the girls' roles whenever he could.

"I had always found my strange dreams frightening and confusing," she explained. "Yet there was something about dressing as a girl that gave me a strange sense of contentment. Somehow, it seemed to feel right.

"The moment I put a dress on I felt less clumsy, more natural and more peaceful than I have ever remembered feeling before."

With the benefit of hindsight, and the more enlightened times in which we live, it may seem surprising that it took Keith another 30 years to fully understand that sense of contentment. BUt back in 1953, boys were boys and girls were girls. No seven year old could think anything else, let alone the son of staunch Jehovah's Witness parents.

And so started the long mental struggle against the inevitable, through puberty and teens, and into an early married life. Keith had always been popular with the girls, mainly because he found he could relate to them in a way that other boys just couldn't. He and his future wife Marilyn seemed made for each other from the start, and by the time he was 21 they were married and settled in a modern semi-detached house in suburban Hertfordshire. The birth of twin boys seemed to seal their future.

In many ways, Keith appeared the perfect husband. His career was really taking off and in the office he was a shining star, but he still found time to take his share of the domestic role. Some fathers may have done it grudgingly, but Keith relished every minute.

"To bath my sons and watch them gurgle with joy as they splashed around in the water was a constant delight," she said. "I was really in my element and couldn't have felt happier"

Marilyn's second pregnancy was a difficult one, and in her sixth month she was confined to bed with a threatened miscarriage. Despite his demanding job, Keith took on looking after his wife, the two young children and all the housework.

"It makes me smile now when I think about the midwife who used to call round to check up on Marilyn's progress. How it used to amuse her to see me struggling with a baby under each arm and a vacuum cleaner in one hand. 'You know,' I remember her saying to me once, 'you would make someone a wonderful wife.'"

A wonderful wife, certainly, yet Keith could never make a wonderful husband, however much he tried. He loved Marilyn deeply, but he had always found it hard to show this in the traditional masculine way, between the sheets. After a while, he found it impossible.

He sought advice from his doctor, and then from a psychiatrist who eventually suggested hypnosis. Although Keith knew little of what he had said while he was in a hypnotic state, Marilyn was present during the session and heard all that went on. It was the turning point in both their lives.

What Marilyn had heard, combined with her knowledge of Keith's childhood recurrent dream and his lack of masculinity in so many ways convinced her that she had found the root of his problems. It was she who persuaded her husband the following evening to try on a dress, for the first time since childhood, and to sit patiently while she made up his face. He felt self-conscious and a little silly, yet at the same time he experienced that inner peace he remembered from his childhood dressing. It was as if his inner soul and outer appearance were finally being resolved.

In fantasy fiction, of course, that would have been the happy ending. Real life is far more complicated than that...

Just being told you are a woman in a man's body is no solution. Keith, after months of desperation following that initial revelation, could see no way out of his turmoil - bar one, suicide.

He was brought back from the very edge, having written a farewell letter to Marilyn and actually counting out the tablets in his hand, by the timely intervention of a friend's phone call. He was persuaded to change his mind, and agreed to put thoughts of death behind him. He encouraged Marilyn to take a lover, to meet her natural physical needs, and she in turn helped him with research into his condition and what could be done to help him.

The only sensible course of action open to him was gender reassignment and eventually Keith, with Marilyn's support, took the biggest decision of his life to start that long and painful process of becoming a woman.

The gender reassignment process began through a specialist psychologist at Manchester's Wythenshawe Hospital and then with Dr Russell Reid at Charing Cross Hospital in London.

With hormone treatment and electrolysis, Keith's appearance soon began to change. He had to live a double life, showing his psychologist that he could pass as a woman in London yet still hold down his job as a man in the North, where he and Marilyn were then living. It meant keeping his jacket on and wearing larger shirts to hide his growing breasts.

The change in his appearance, and the general feminising effect on his nature of the hormones was more than Marilyn could face. She opted out, taking the children to live with their mother down South. Keith's long line of sacrifices to become Stephanie had begun.

Over a long number of months, Keith slowly became Stephanie. He had lessons in make-up and deportment, and learnt to dress as a woman, act as a woman and speak as a woman. When the time came for the final operation, Stephanie would be as ready as she could be to face the world.

She knew by then some of the problems she was to face. Her father had told her he would disown her if she went ahead with the operation, Marilyn was gone, and the children had become distant. However, at least she had her job being kept open for her. Keith Hull was officially leaving the post of marketing director to be replaced by Miss Stephanie Anne Lloyd.

The sex change itself took place on September 12th 1983, the day that Stephanie was really 'born' - at the age of 37 - as a fully grown woman. As she came round from her operation, with the surgeon standing beside her bed, it was a moment of intense and unrivalled emotion for her.

"I was exultant, there's no other word for it. I'd come through and now I was truly a woman. There was nothing left to fear.

"I had tears of pure joy streaming down my face. I could only look at the eyes of the surgeon - my 'creator' - and pray that he understood my gratitude. He'd given me back my life."

Stephanie was full of hope after the operation, and despite the pain felt happier than she had ever been. However, it wasn't long before she received her next body blow. The press had been intrigued by titbits they'd heard about the senior executive who was swapping pin stripes for stilettos. Within days of returning to work, she found herself splashed across banner headlines in the Daily Mirror.

Her firm got the jitters about the effect of the publicity on their institutional shareholders, and suggested she should resign. Suddenly she was unemployed.

Then came the divorce hearing, when Marilyn turned against the woman she had played a part in creating. She went for the jugular and Stephanie, not wanting to fight her wife and children, ended up with nothing - not even a bed to sleep on.

The next few months were as difficult as they could be. With the support of just a few close friends, Stephanie struggled to survive. The once-affluent marketing director was not only unemployed, but virtually unemployable. Thanks to the Daily Mirror, she was regarded as a freak.

It was during those dark days that Stephanie took stock of her situation. She wasn't ready for a life on the dole, she needed to occupy her business brain to keep her sanity. And if no one else would employ her, she would have to set up on her own.

At that time there were no businesses in the UK catering openly and exclusively for the needs of the transgendered community. Stephanie knew that there should be - she had experienced the isolation, loneliness and confusion that had almost driven her to suicide. If she could help others along the way to actually enjoying their femininity, rather than fearing it, and at the same time make a living for herself it seemed the perfect solution.

Her enthusiasm for the project was infectious and she soon gained the support of the brother of her beautician, who was looking for a business to invest in. The brother, Raiko Ristic, could also offer sales expertise to complement her marketing skills and together they believed they could make it work. Although Raiko's financial backing was enough for them to consider opening a retail shop, they needed more investment if they were to realise all of Stephanie's plan. She wanted transvestites who couldn't get to the shop to be able to buy what they needed through mail order.

Even more radically, she wanted to open Europe's very first TV beauty parlour, where we could not only buy wigs and cosmetics, but also be taught how to use them. A Transformation service is now almost taken for granted, but it was revolutionary in its time.

This was where David Booth entered the equation. David, a no-nonsense Northerner with a keen business sense and quick sense of humour, had answered her advert for backers in the Manchester Evening News. He and Stephanie hit it off from the start and have continued to do so - they are now husband and wife.

The opening of Transformation in Manchester gave transvestites the chance to experience everything they had ever dreamed of in a shop. Under one roof they could not only buy the clothes and accessories they had fantasised about wearing, but even try them on first. A shop where a man can pop in and see how he looks in a dress is very rare even nowadays - in the mid-1980s it was totally unheard of.

As well as buying clothes, wigs and shoes, TVs could get advice on make-up and even have lessons on how to apply it. There were full beauty treatments laid on such as manicures, massages and wanting to pamper them in the most

feminine way possible.

And did transvestites flock to reap the benefits of this experience? In a word, no.

In fact, the early response from the UK transvestite population was practically non-existent. Perhaps they didn't know the opportunity was there, or maybe they were just too nervous to use it. Either way, Stephanie's business dream was crumbling.

"It was very difficult in those early days with so much open prejudice aimed at transvestites and transsexuals," Stephanie recalled. "Newspapers and magazines wouldn't take our advertising because transvestism was regarded purely as a sexual perversion. They wouldn't have anything to do with us."

This feeling of transvestism being 'perverted' was also shared by the transvestites themselves, who were scared to put their heads above the parapet in a society where they were equated with child molesters.

It's hard to think now how different things were for transvestites only a few years ago. Before Transformation, there were no TV shops, only those that catered for the likes of us under the guise of 'television, theatre and drag' suppliers.

There was the national society - the Beaumont Society - but this, at the time, was steeped in the need for complete privacy and confidentiality. Well meaning, but as insular as a medieval leper colony run by the lepers themselves, which even barred gay TVs from membership.

"We seemed to be fighting alone to change the image of transvestites in society, and it was an uphill struggle which the business just couldn't withstand for long," said Stephanie.

"I knew from my experience that transvestites were genuine people who deserved the best service we could give, and both Raiko and David trusted my judgement and commitment. But, for one reason or another, the customers just weren't coming through the door, and I felt it was all my fault.

"It was around then that a lady customer, whom I had got to know quite well, suggested a way of avoiding bankruptcy. What we needed was a specialist service that would appeal to all men, not just TVs. She convinced me that if I offered massages in my flat above the shop - with all the sexual extras - it would all be perfectly legal. She even told me where to go for advice - a solicitor who became my first customer!"

Stephanie found, much to her surprise, that she had the aptitude to make a great hooker. She could be mentally detached yet considerate enough to make sure her customers got just what they wanted, however bizarre that might have been.

For example, there was the man who liked to be wrapped as a parcel in brown paper, and have Stephanie open it up and pretend to be surprised. Or there was the guy who liked to wear her knickers, have fresh eggs put inside them and then have her slap his bottom to break the shells.

Compared to all this, the cross dressing customers in the shop below would have seemed quite normal to anybody.

Sex pays - and the money that Stephanie could earn by tickling her 'straight' clients' fancies in the upstairs flat kept the transvestite business afloat. More than that, it paradoxically gave transvestites an excuse to go there - it's a strange reflection of society that a man would prefer being seen going into a sexy massage parlour than a transvestite shop. But, at least in those days, he would.

And so the customers started to come, not just from Manchester and surrounds, but from all over the country. transvestites would travel 100s of miles just to be able to sample the Transformation experience, and maybe to meet Stephanie herself. She had become famous (or infamous perhaps!) as the first UK champion of transvestites and transsexuals. She spoke up for them in television, radio and newspaper interviews and openly challenged society's narrow minded attitudes.

Inevitably, her willingness to stand up and be counted made her unpopular with the authorities. She suffered continual harassment from the local council about the shop, and it didn't take long for the police to bring an end to her days as a happy hooker.

Usually, the boys in blue would turn a blind eye to such goings-on in the privacy of a flat, but of course they made an exception for Stephanie. She was the one massage service they raided. She was set up by an undercover detective, then arrested and taken to the local police station where she was left in a dank cell. "They had arrested poor Raiko as well, and charged us under some archaic law of keeping a bawdy house. It was an ancient piece of legislation, but they were so determined to get me they would use anything.

"Sitting in that cell was the lowest point in my life. I was so desperately worried, not for myself, but for Raiko and especially for David - what on earth was I going to say to him?"

David had been the perfect business partner. He had trusted Stephanie to use his investment wisely and had stayed out of the day-to-day running of affairs. He had always known the transvestite business might take some time to make a profit and had been willing to wait and see what happened. He had had no idea that the recent success was backed by the money making activities going on in Stephanie's flat.

David took it calmly, as is his nature, when a tearful Stephanie rang to break the news to him before it was splashed across the evening papers. He understood why she had literally sold herself for her business, but couldn't condone it. He went on to act like a rock during the nine long months her case took to come to trial.

It was a difficult time, and a heavy cloud hung over Stephanie as she waited to learn whether she would be sent to prison - it would have been a male prison at that - but it was a cloud with a silver lining. At the trial, the prosecution pushed for a deal. If she would change her plea to guilty, all charges against Raiko would be dropped. Raiko objected, but Stephanie went in to the dock alone, admitted she may have broken an archaic law, and was sent home with a suspended sentence.

With her days of sexual services now over and Transformation a going concern in its own right, things looked good. But the best was yet to come with David's proposal of marriage.

Accepting the proposal was easy, but carrying it through would be different again. Another archaic law in the UK prevents transsexuals legally marrying someone of the opposite sex. So, in February 1986, the couple flew to Sri Lanka for a Valentine's Day wedding in the sun. It was a second marriage for both of them, although for Stephanie of course her first as a bride resplendent in a beautiful, off-white dress.

"David had taught me what true love really means, and I couldn't have been happier," she said. "It was a fairy-tale wedding and honeymoon for us both."

"Obviously, we would have liked our marriage to have been recognised as lawful in this country, and it's quite ludicrous that it still isn't to this day. But we weren't going to let that get in the way of our happiness."

Back home, David concentrated his efforts on his food chain business, while Raiko and Stephanie looked to the future of Transformation. Customers were now coming into the shop, but there was a vast untapped market out there still trapped in a secret, hidden world and who hadn't yet dared cross the threshold. They needed a top quality mail order service.

The first Transformation catalogue was to be like one never seen before. Stephanie wanted only the finest photography, the glossiest printing and the prettiest models - both male and female - to wear the most feminine clothes. But of course, she faced problems.

"It was difficult to find a good studio willing to take on such an unusual project, as nobody had ever photographed TVs before except for places who specialised in porn. We wanted elegant photos to show how well our clothes looked on TVs.

Eventually we were lucky in persuading a top studio in Manchester to take us seriously, and we've never looked back. The results from that first shoot were breathtaking, and the photographer was amazed at how professional the TV models could look. We've regularly used the same studio ever since."

Finding someone to print Transformation's catalogue - and its new range of contact magazines and the fledgling TV Scene - was even more problematic. The lads in the printing trade weren't happy about being linked with transvestites and their bosses just turned down the job.

Again, it took Stephanie's powers of persuasion to finally break down enough prejudice to have her magazines printed. She wasn't to be held to ransom, however, and within a short time the company invested in its own five-colour Heidelberg printing press.

Expansion continued in other ways. In Manchester, Stephanie started the country's first exclusive hotel for TVs, where they could have dinner, bed and breakfast in comfortable feminine surroundings, while in London came the opening of Transformation's second shop in a prime site by Euston station.

However, for Stephanie herself, the opening of the Albany Clinic was perhaps the major milestone of this period. This was to be a centre of excellence for latent transsexuals to seek proper medical advice and guidance on their condition - a service so sadly lacking when Stephanie had been in that position.

"There's very little understanding amongst the general medical profession about transsexuals, as I personally experienced in those early days", said Stephanie. "There was a crying need for a centre where clients could receive the best possible help and information, and I was delighted when we were in a financial position to provide it."

The charges to the Albany Clinic clients have never covered the overheads and it has always been financially subsidised by David. It's a loss-maker that is maintained with pride.

The basis of Transformation's success has always been the quality of its service. Stephanie never would accept second-best just because here customers were TVs, a policy which was soon to bring her into even more trouble than ever before.

Transformation had always had its clothes specially made to suit the male frame, and had later moved into full publishing to print the type of books and magazines TVs wanted to read. So why not videos?

The only videos then available were mainly American and had a strong sexual content. There was a call for softer video films along the lines of familiar TV fantasy stories like 'boy meets girl, girl dresses him up'. So Stephanie and Raiko decided Transformation should make their own.

It seemed a good idea in theory, but by making transvestite videos Stephanie found herself back in conflict with the authorities, under yet another set of laws. And this time they were determined to get her...

The Story So Far...

Businessman Keith Hull lost his family, his career and most of his friends when he became Stephanie Anne Lloyd. But, with the help of business partner Raiko Ristic and the financial backing of businessman David Booth, Stephanie achieved her ambition of opening the country's first ever transvestite store.

She and David fell in love and were married on Valentine's Day in Sri Lanka. It should have been a fairy tale start to her living happily ever after. However, as an outspoken campaigner on behalf of TVs and TSs, she wasn't allowed to get away so lightly.

The police raid came as a complete shock. The Manchester shop, TMC offices and Stephanie's home were all hit simultaneously in a huge operation that must have been months in the planning.

The mass invaders searched wherever, whatever and whoever they chose - including Stephanie herself - and took away boxes and boxes of videos and goods for "further examination". The nightmare had begun.

Stephanie had known for a long time that the authorities would go to almost any lengths to drive her out of business. Her open support of transvestites and transsexuals - whom the powers that be regarded as perverts - had really got them worked up. There had been constant skirmishes with the likes of the local council, who tried to impose regulations against Transformation that didn't apply anywhere else. Stephanie had always stood her ground, and had always eventually won.

The raid proved to be different though. The squads of police that invaded her that day did find a little nugget to hold on to amongst all the goods they seized. Some of the videos didn't have the proper paperwork - and for that both Stephanie and Raiko were to be sent to prison on a charge that normally brought no more than a Â£500 fine.

The paperwork in question was a certificate from the British Board of Film Classification. Stephanie and Raiko had tried to cut a corner on the overheads to widen their product range. It was an economy they were soon to regret. "Looking back, it was a silly thing to do, but we just hadn't realised what the consequences could be," said Stephanie.

"It wasn't as if the videos were pornographic - some were information films for TVs; others were TV fantasy fiction that was available in books at that time, but not on film. The only videos around elsewhere were mostly crude and in poor taste, we thought.

"We wanted to do better for our customers by producing films ourselves and be able to sell them in our shops at an affordable price. If we had had to pay the high fees for having each film certified, it would have been impossible.

"So we thought we could do the same as other small video companies had done and avoid paying the fees. Others who

had been found out had just had a slap on the wrist - we presumed we would be treated much the same."

"It turned out we were very wrong. Instead of the standard fine of £500 and a warning from the judge, the company was hit for £6,000 - and both Raiko and I, as directors, were sentenced to a year in prison. It wasn't so much justice as revenge."

The police had ensured that the trial centred on the 'perversion' of transvestism, based on their hardened belief that all TVs were gay and worse besides. As a convicted promoter of such perversions, Stephanie was sent to a remand centre and put in with a group of mentally ill inmates.

Risley Remand Centre at Warrington - known as 'Grisly Risley' - is a hideous place wherever you are, but the most depressing and claustrophobic section of all is the basement, where Stephanie was locked away with just a mattress on the floor and a plastic pot in the corner. Here was a sophisticated and intelligent business woman, who had been expecting to be dining out with her husband that night, the court case behind her. Instead, she was trapped behind bars with a group of women who were, to say the least, mentally unstable.

"It's hard to describe how awful it was to be locked up in that place. I was in total and utter shock" she said.

"The women in there should have been in a psychiatric hospital, not just shut away in prison. One of them really had the devil in her and wasn't even trusted with a knife and fork in case she attacked someone. It was very, very frightening."

Stephanie was kept there for three days, the longest and most tortured 72 hours of her life, before being moved to a women's open prison near York. Open prisons often have the reputation of being little more than just holiday camps - at least amongst those who have never had to be in one. The reality is very far from that.

Stephanie found herself suddenly having to share her days and nights with convicted murderers, thieves and drug dealers. She had never come across illegal drugs of any kind before, but in prison they were rife, as was violence and intimidation amongst some of the inmates. She kept herself to herself as much as possible. She was different to the others, partly because hers was a technical offence that hadn't harmed anyone, but mostly because of her history. She was the only prisoner there who hadn't been born a woman.

"The worst part of it was the feeling that I was trapped in that place and there was absolutely nothing I could do to get

myself out and away. We were appealing against the sentence, of course, but that seemed to be taking ages and was out of my control. "So I just had to make the best of it while I waited. And, although it was a painful experience overall, that period in my life did have its high points that I can look back on with affection."

These high points all came through her work at a centre for handicapped children near York. Every Tuesday, as a trusted prisoner, she was allowed out to spend the day with the children - helping them with their exercises, reading to them and giving them love and support.

As a transsexual, Stephanie was used to feeling like an outsider from society. She found she had a great affinity towards the children, who were also excluded through no fault of their own/ It was an affinity she had never really experienced before. She didn't forget her experience with the children, and after she had won her freedom she continued with voluntary work for the charity Riding for the Disabled.

It took 3 long months before her appeal was eventually heard, and she was immediately released. The Appeal Court judges had been in no doubt at all that the sentence had been excessively harsh. Stephanie should have been jubilant, but the strain of being in prison had taken its toll. And once back at home, she had a business to run.

"Everyone suffers when someone is locked away like that. It was bad for me of course, and for Raiko who had had an even worse time of it. But David had been just left to carry all the burdens of the business alone, and to worry about me at the same time.

"He was wonderful, and without him and the commitment of our staff the business would just not have survived. Once I was free, I was determined to play my full part."

Transformation moved up another gear, with the opening of more stores around the UK. By now, Stephanie was beginning to win the propaganda battle and a transvestite shop was more acceptable than before. Only in Scotland did they hit a brick wall. The Scottish laws are different from the English ones in a number of ways, and the legislators who wear tartan skirts and frilly shirts don't understand men who wear floral skirts and blouses. Instead, Newcastle-on-Tyne proved the ideal compromise.

At the same time the company expanded its mail-order business in the USA and Europe, and especially in Germany. When she wasn't working long hours in the office, Stephanie was on the road or in the air. She had always been a workaholic, but the wasted months in prison were driving her even harder, Her body just couldn't take it. One Sunday

evening in 1990, at the end of yet another weekend of paperwork and planning, Stephanie suffered a stroke that left her paralysed down the right hand side of her body. After intensive physiotherapy over several months, she was fortunate enough to make a full recovery.

"It was a warning that I couldn't ignore. The doctors told me I was working myself into an early grave and it was an especially worrying time for David. I had to agree to a total change in lifestyle."

"We moved out of the bustle of Manchester and bought a small holding in a beautiful and tranquil area of Wales. Here I could literally lose myself in the vast openness of the countryside, where David and I can walk together across the hills for miles and never see another soul.

I could also indulge myself in the company of animals. Dogs had always been my most constant and faithful companions, and this was their ideal environment. We started to keep sheep and now even have three adorable llamas. In times of stress there's nothing more relaxing than being out in the fields with the animals. And in the lambing season it's especially magical - that must be my favourite time of the year.

But you can't keep a good workaholic down, and even the distractions of the countryside couldn't keep Stephanie away from the action. She started commuting regularly into the office, and when she wasn't there she kept in constant touch via fax or mobile phone. It wasn't what the doctor had ordered. Again, the stress

took its toll.

Two further strokes followed over the next few years. Each time she has recovered, although the last one has caused some permanent damage to her sight. Next time, she knows she may not be so lucky.

"I know I should slow down, everybody tells me I should, and it makes perfect sense. But we've come so far in a relatively short time, and there's so much more I would like to do. My problem is, I enjoy it so much I just don't want to stop. When I look back at how we started against all the odds and how we had to battle to succeed, it's an achievement I'll always be proud of.

The growth of Transformation has been an astonishing one. It now has four stores in major UK cities. At the same time, it's extensive mail order and online business serves customers throughout the world.

The Albany Clinic has helped scores of would-be transsexuals to come to terms with their condition, guiding them along the once difficult path towards gender reassignment. It has also provided the necessary counselling for many TVs, for whom the guilt of cross-dressing had become confused with transsexualism, to help them understand how they could learn to enjoy their femininity without any need of surgery.

Transformation's greatest success, however, has been through its pioneering of the transvestite cause. Remember, before Transformation, there were no specialist shops in the UK catering exclusively for the needs of TVs. There was nowhere in the country that TVs could go to try on a skirt, never mind being able to dress as a woman and spend several hours in the role.

Manchester didn't want us, and when the Transformation store opened in Birmingham there was an outcry in the evening papers. In the late 1980s, just a short while ago, transvestites were merely perverts in the eyes of good Midlands folk. It was Stephanie who showed them they were wrong. Now, cross-dressing is considered more quirky than kinky. You can hardly open a women's magazine or turn on the television without some cross-dresser getting in on the act.

The one person you're not likely to see is Stephanie herself. After years of campaigning in the harsh lights of media coverage, she now leaves that to others.

"I did it because I felt I had to, when no one else would. Transvestism was just swept under carpet and society didn't seem to care about the effect this had on the TVs themselves. And as for transsexuals like myself, we were just freaks of nature that no one wanted to know.

"We've got beyond that, thankfully. I'm still here fighting on issues, like the stupidity of the law that prevents me from being my husband's legal wife, but from the sidelines and not from centre stage. I just want a quiet life."

Stephanie has had a life with more than its fair share of ups and downs. Who could have predicted that the high-flying, macho marketing manager of the 1970s would in a few short years be spending time in a women's prison? But then who could have predicted that she would have found a husband to protect and care for her; that she could have built up an international company; that she could have broken down barriers that had existed for centuries, or that she could have helped deliver a lamb.

It's been quite a life so far. Only time will tell whether her dream of a quieter life for the future is the one fantasy that Transformation can't turn into reality...