

An Impossible Journey

Romana Perna 05-17-2020

The foggy beginning



I was born with no desire to conform; this has made me annoyingly different. No part of my life has ever seemed to be planned by me; it just unfolded. I was a child adrift in a sea of confusion; I still am. I had undiagnosed autism. However, I liked to explore and figure things out, and get into things. In a sense, this is my life. I wasn't very good at it at first, but I'm always getting better.

During my high school years, I slowly become interested in girls, but I dismissed any romantic notions as too illogical. I also wanted to explore girls' lives by dressing like them, but that was simply too embarrassing for me to admit.

I really wasn't mature enough for college in 1961; I barely managed to produce good grades. There was a major change in 1963: I developed a libido and a notion that I had to have a woman in my life. I met several young women at the University of Washington, but it led to culture shock. These women had notions of liberation, but there had never been any hint of such a possibility in my family environment with my chauvinistic dad, who ran the family like a bully.

Military service



Air Force basic training, September, 1965.
A young Asperger man's introduction to hell.

I received a draft notice in 1965, after college graduation, but I enlisted in the Air Force instead. Basic training was awful.

Military life was very constraining; at least, it got me away from home and taught me to live on my own. My life then was hardly inspired, but I did get to explore New Mexico and other nearby states.

After I got out of the Air force, I got a job in 1970 as a computer programmer on Vandenberg AFB. A lack dating prospects, coupled with my lack of social experience, was awful. I decided to return to Washington State in 1977, to work for Boeing.

Romance and exploration



I started dating. This time, I added risk-taking to my exploration. I went on a lonely hearts radio program, called the *Loveline*, three times. It was ridiculously gut-wrenching for me at the time. On the third time, I met Carolyn in January, 1979. Carolyn, who was four years my senior, pursued me. I did not know what else to do, so I let the relationship unfold. We were married in June 1980 by mutual agreement. I never proposed.

Okay, I loved Carolyn dearly, but she was manipulative. She wanted to turn me into her version of the ideal husband. Carolyn's complaints were like: *you dress like a bum, you never want to dress up to go anywhere, you don't understand me, and you don't communicate well at all.*

I took it as a challenge, but how was I going to do it? I wondered if there was a reason for my life-long desire to cross-dress, so I decided to check it out. In the single most illogical moment of my life, I went to work on Halloween, 1989, dressed as a woman. I did not feel that different at all; it was interesting.

It was an understatement to say that no one else thought cross-dressing was a good idea!

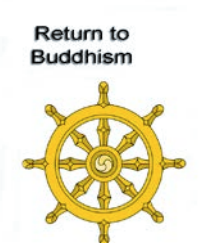
I pushed hard to stay married. My main tact was to take an interest in Carolyn's life and stop saying *no* every time she wanted to do something. I made a special effort to take her places, especially to symphonies, ballets, and operas.

Carolyn said, "Hell will freeze over before I go out with you dressed as a woman except to your cross-dressing events." That restriction did not last long, because I learned to pass in women's restrooms, which meant taking Carolyn to more musical arts events.

Going to the opera one evening, "I want you to dress as Dennis; some of my church friends will be there!" When we got to our seats, she asked for some things from my handbag, which I never carried as Dennis. Her church friends had already seen me cross-dressed.

In 2005, I started living full-time as Romana. In 2006, I found out I had Asperger's syndrome, because I saw an article on television. Also, my therapist confirmed this diagnosis at our next meeting with him.

I thought I was dealing well with issues, but that was an illusion. I had ignored the fact that Carolyn was falling apart, both physically and emotionally. She died in November 2010. I won't repeat any of the terrible details here. I was forced to find a way out of my Asperger rut, and I had to do it as a woman. My reasoning was that my failure to pay attention to events in Carolyn's life contributed to her death because of my inaction. I needed to be aware!



My Buddhist shrine is always changing. It is a symbol of my devotion to the teachings of all the Buddhist masters that came before me. The background Thangka is a representation of Tara, in her white aspect. Tara is the goddess of transcendental wisdom and compassion.



I went back to my Buddhist practice in 2011. It was *a better late than never* thing. I should never have taken a 26-year break from meditation.

My living room became my shrine room. I used my mediation practice to manage or eliminate a lot of my emotional baggage, such as anger management problems. I eliminated shyness, and took a big chunk out of my Asperger tics. In Buddhism, these are called *habitual patterns*, or karmic loops. No matter how many I dealt with, there are always a lot more left over.

I receive insight and mild enlightenment during mediation. Unfortunately, once I think I've figured it all out, I have to go back to the beginning, since my heightened sense of intuition has now added error detection, since my conclusions often seem to be wrong!

As I moved into the neurologically typical, binary world, I got a lot of push back. I am still working on how to be an Asperger extrovert. One of my new goals is to be ultra calm in the face of adversity—I'm having some success.



I've had no success finding a new woman in my life, despite my boldness and confidence. Of course, trying to date women online in the 66-81 year age group was probably a lost cause from the start. Pursuing women while dressed as one was just one of my fantasies. I pursued women like a pushy male, which did not go over well at all. In the end, I developed social skills that taught me how to deal with constant rejection. This became an opportunity for personal

introspection. I am not alone in this failure, since *Facebook* is filled with profiles of other trans-women who can't find girlfriends either.

Now I've developed manners and social skills that may be better than those possessed by most males, but it has not helped me to find love.

I quit using online dating sites altogether. I posted both views of me, and had an honest profile. However, I discovered that women focused on my male picture, instead of reading the details. They wanted to date my picture, but I'm so much more than just an image. The fact that I still look somewhat like Dennis—in bed—has had no traction whatsoever.

Okay, I would do better dating if dressed as Dennis, but that was my problem identity. Actually, for the average autistic person, any identity is a major issue, since identity is closely linked to cultural values that are seldom logical.



In 2013, I dressed as Violetta, from Verdi's "La Traviata." I've even gone grocery shopping dressed this way. No one paid me much attention.

I needed to figure out my dating dilemma. Was I a victim of my own success? Was I passing as a woman too well? No, I only created a well-engineered image, just like Carolyn taught me. In many of the circles I travel in, cis-women often complain that I'm creating too high a bar. I'm never nervous or uncomfortable, even while all dolled up in a fancy dress. I'm perfectly able to act like the male in the relationship, despite my attire.

I used meditation to search for the answer. At first, I blamed men for my predicament; then I realized that was not true. Then I blamed women, since they obviously controlled what kind of men they would date. Ultimately, I abandoned that idea too. I certainly did not want to add to all the stresses placed on women, and I wanted to avoid all blame games.





I have studied animals on nature programs. I noticed many things that aren't usually discussed. First, female mammals all seem to enjoy sex just as much as males. All sex is recreational sex, even seasonal mating, because it occurs in moments of heightened body chemistry and emotions. There is no notion to the participants that it is for reproduction. Reproduction occurs because animals mate without any consideration of the consequences.

This is evolution in action. Dating and mating has the highest priority. Females prefer males with the most testosterone, because there is the promise of the most exciting sex. Female mammals nurse their babies by supplying milk. Structurally, males are often left out of any care for young babies. Since everyone starts out as female, males have rudimentary nipples. It is said that some men can will themselves to produce milk, but this is not considered to be a useful human condition. Dayak fruit bats are one of the few mammals where males actually nurse their young too.

Females tend to get stuck with the babies, which seems to be an unfortunate side-effect of mammal evolution.

Sexual dimorphism adds another twist to the life of mammals. Species with pronounced sexual differences seem to end up with roles based on gender. African lions are a prime example. Female lions are the social core of their society, while males exist to guard the territory and to mate with the females. The reign of the *King of Beasts* is often short-lived due to all the required physical exertion.

There has been a lot of debate, but biologists question whether mammals with sexual dimorphism, except humans, practice monogamy. In nature, monogamous pairs, like jackals, dogs, and foxes look similar to each other.

Humans emphasize
sexual dimorphism





Throughout the animal kingdom, only humans ever seem to mate at bedtime. Going to bed can be slang for having sex. I don't object this, but I'm out of the loop. I do object to the regimentation of humans based on gender. Gender is an active means to participate in the world, while sexuality is just chromosomes.

Modern humans started out as societies of hunter gathers. Sexual dimorphism tended to group people into roles. Women developed the ability of have sex all year long. This was as much for the benefit of women, as men. Women developed enlarged breasts that were just meant to be gender markers. The current preoccupation in the West with women's breasts seems to be a sophomoric obsession.

Thus began the animalistic feature where women chose the men, and men competed for mating rights. Women wanted physically robust men, because such men were more likely to provide the most exciting sex. Dating and mating became the highest priority for humans, overriding all other needs. Men and women became stuck in roles that are programmatic, which is just evolution in action.



If women prefer men high in testosterone, it has meant that testosterone remained elevated in men. There is a theory that civilization started when historic testosterone levels went down in men, but I think current levels are still too high, since men create 98% of the violence. This has been personal for me, since my gender transition was a struggle to deal with too much testosterone.

Socialization matters too. My observations indicate that trans-women are emotionally different than cis-women, just as trans-men are different from cis-men. While I consider myself to be a woman, I don't possess a sense of limitation like a cis-woman. Trans-men often seem to have better social skills than most cis-men; yet, trans-men usually take testosterone supplements that create high libidos.

It's generally agreed that the rise of civilization was not good for women's rights. I believe this too. While there were exceptions, women became the homebound property of their husbands. Men, on the other hand, became embroiled in politics and war. I do need to mention that only a small percentage of the men always ordered all the damage.

Men and women were given separate roles and different modes of dress to reinforce sexual dimorphism. This boundary became enforced by cultural standards, without even being written down. Generation after generation grew up programmed to reinforce this standard. This is a classic example of habitual patterns, which have been discussed throughout Buddhist teachings.

Starting in the nineteenth century, women began to resist this compartmentalism that had restrained them for centuries. Even though women were becoming educated, they were essentially ignored, which meant half the world's intellect was banished from the public arena.

Even with the rise of feminism, progress has been slow. I think it has morphed into more repeating karmic loops within loops. While I'm quite comfortable with ambiguity and the lack of comfort zones, the majority of people are not. In order to have change, everyone must want to change.

**ADVENTURE AND
ROMANCE**



After conflicts, people have often celebrated by having sex; this is as old as history. The creation of motion pictures enhanced the concept of romance. Both men and women wanted to emulate what they saw on the silver screen. Celluloid women became way too beautiful, and men too handsome. This was a fantasy, not life. Yet, this morphed into the expectations of everyone and became part of the culture.

Popular culture looks like a movie to me. People seemed to be going through motions to live this dream. This has meant the requirement that people match these roles, has had the consequences of unreasonable expectations. Despite women's liberation, the sale of beauty products in commercials and magazines has not abated. Women have become stuck with the concept of being *hot!*

It's so romantic when the hero and the heroine get married at the end of the adventure. The focus is always on a few years of passion, but never the relationship. After the passion begins to die down, there is still a relationship and endless problems to deal with. Cultural roles can make things worse, if rigid roles don't change.

Watch the 1947 movie, *Unconquered*, starring Gary Cooper and Paulette Goddard:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phrYEKv0rmw>

Romana has
gone rogue.



When I met Carolyn, I had a rescue mentality. When I had my first insights during meditation, I thought I could fix the world by pointing out the

lack of logic. Now, the insight keeps coming, but all I can do is improve myself. My conclusions have made me very unpopular.

I see everyone trapped in roles mostly caused by sexual dimorphism. There's no logical reason for this behavior. As goddesses, women have the privilege of beauty, and a selection of lovers. They can hold men to constrained standards, and only select certain types of men. During the Stone Age, such men made great partners, but now they can only be tolerated for a short time, until the passion dies down. No matter how much women complain, they can never be liberated until men are liberated too.

My conclusions are not all academic; I experienced intense physical and emotional interaction with Carolyn. Clearly, she was enchanted with me as a lover; in fact, I practically could do no wrong. I had all sorts of neuroses; after all, I was Asperger, so friction eventually built up. I was perplexed how to solve our dilemma, so I decided to make personality changes that made me non-standard. My refusal to be culturally constrained created even more problems.

Years ago, when modern feminism first emerged, I heard the claim that men would be judged on their own merits. This never happened. When I was on feminist *Facebook* groups, I saw women blaming men. I complained about this and was asked to leave. Perhaps a few men enjoy the hyper-sexuality of chasing and harassing women, but I doubt the majority want any part of it, but feel trapped in masculine roles. I think men are raised to be good lovers, rather than good partners with social skills. This is the flaw in the scheme where men can only have an intimate relationship only if some woman chooses them.

I'm not influenced by peer pressure, but most neurologically typical, binary people don't seem to be able to function without peer acceptance. Peer pressure is the major reason habitual patterns don't easily change. Habitual patterns are not the same as physical laws; they can be changed, but not without a lot of thought, guts, determination, and contemplation.



I named myself after a character in the television series *Dr. Who*. My woman-image is like that of a character from fantasy and science fiction, where roles for women are a lot less constrained than in the conventional world.

It's my nature to find ways to fix things. I find reality to be disturbing, and not quite *real*. Human lives last only for a couple of clicks of the cosmic clock; yet, the pursuit of life is too often repetitive and mindless. I've found that I can't affect any cultural processes. I can't even get a woman who wants to be liberated from the mess. It was unrealistic that I could engineer the first truly egalitarian marriage ever.

How can this be fixed? Here are solutions that don't take forever. I'm using my absurd sense of humor here.

Plan A: Cultural Change, The Usual

People don't live long, so cultural changes can come quickly in time. This was presented by Geena Davis at an Inspire Luncheon in Seattle a few years ago. Her prediction was that 700 years might have to pass before women become equal. I concur with this estimate. At no time did she suggest that women might be part of the problem. I talked to her in person and brought up the plight of trans-women. She said they were working on it.

Plan B: By Example

So, maybe watching all the liberated people in a science fiction series like *The Expanse*, 400 years in the future, could convince women and men to be liberated in a similar manner...now. Yet, all the actors go home to standard partners after the productions are finished. Life does not mimic art, in this case.

Plan C: Cross-dressing

Allowing husbands and boyfriends to cross-dress would certainly shake up the *status quo*. It could change the nature of civilization. I used to think this idea was great; what could go wrong? Some wives have even encouraged husbands to cross-dress as a means for dealing with marital issues.

Unfortunately, some of the same wives divorced their husbands after the husbands became too involved in cross-dressing. Men can take up cross-dressing as just another hobby, without regard to the impact on their marriages. Cross-dressing does not imbue men with social skills, and can't make a man a better husband, *per se*.

There might be thousands of couples where the women stay with their transgender husbands. This is quite rare and secretive, and requires a lot of effort to make it work. Such couples are exceptional.

Gender Is Not A Cultural Construct

I used to think that cross-dressing indicated that gender was a *cultural construct*. In general, I no longer think that gender is fluid. Because of evolution, I now believe gender is programmatic, which means many personal traits actually only go with a given gender. I came to this conclusion by studying the lives of both trans-women and trans-men. While I believe that everyone contains both yin and yang, gender identities are heavily influenced by looks, dress, hormones, and lifestyles. Changing gender requires a transition for adjustment. If a man starts dressing as a woman, the need can arise to completely transition to being a woman. This also holds for women, since there are just as many women who transition into men. I remember that I was much like a teenage girl during my transition.

I've lived as a woman for almost 15 years, without much of an effect on me; I'm essentially unchanged. I'm just joking; there have been profound changes. I now view myself as a woman, not a man. Still, I have never had any gender-altering surgeries, and I have no desire to be turned into an exact copy of a cis-woman. I understand that surgeries will make it impossible to get a woman, so I need to resemble a man in bed.

My gender-bending life and philosophical conclusions have not made me popular. While I really like tackling impossible life situations, I'm approaching 78 years of age and running out of energy. In my age range for dating, my cosmic sense of gender-bending is too outrageous. Yet, except for getting a new wife, I have actually succeeded in my impossible journey. I am honest and live without guile; I never have to inflate my resume.

Unlike back in college in 1963, I encourage women to be all they can be. I'm all for women's liberation. As a woman, my women friends tell me all sorts of things not usually shared with men.

I pass as a woman, and I have no protruding Adam's apple. The women's restroom is my restroom; I don't want any men in it. I'm not held back by any cultural restraints on men or women. I observe much of how things works, and I experience the full breadth of life. As a Buddhist, I experience insight daily.

There is irony here concerning people's bodies. The general feeling is that it is wrong to judge people on how they might look naked; yet, standard dress codes make it easy to figure out what people probably look like naked.

I'm scarcely alone in having difficulty finding love. *Love Is Love* is true, but it sure is hard to come by. Just like most cis-women, I want it all regardless of the odds. My libido was once useful, but now it is a nuisance. At least, I have grown to *love* ambiguity.

I have learned many things in my journey. Male and female beauty is pretty much the same. Handsome men can be made up to look like beautiful women. Some people find this really shocking. Yet, social skills are an inherently female trait; such skills are often not even considered desirable in

men. I'm enchanted by women and lose all reason if pursued by a woman. Living as a woman somewhat protects me from being unreasonably manipulated in the name of love.

Attention to my appearance has led to the treatment of more than sixty precancerous skin lesions. I'm getting a lid/brow lift in the near future to correct problems I have with my eyes. I might actually end up looking beautiful, which is something I'm not crazy about.



The human system of dating and mating can be frustrating, especially for those of us left out of the action. A society based on materialism does not help, since people often judge each other based value: how important someone is, and how valuable a partner they would make. If desire is not checked by self-reflection, jealousy, discontent, envy, manipulation, apathy, and even homicide can occur.

Still, as imperfect our society is, things could be worse without the fantasy of romance. Partnering usually persuades people to form relationships as on-the-job training. For men, having a partner keeps them from doing a lot of mischief, even if the only focus is sexual.

Having lived most of my life as a man, I understand the issues that men face. The lives of men can be over-regimented, stuck in male roles with the weight of the world pressing in, without the skills needed for self-improvement. Men are often not allowed to show any feminine side. Male privilege is highly overrated.

Since I grew up Asperger, I did not even have the benefit of any privilege. I did not like being forced to fit a standard, especially like men's monotonous clothing. I also could not meet Carolyn's expectations, so I took up cross-dressing. Thirty years later, I'm finally getting manners and social skills.

I often wonder if a lot of men take up cross-dressing for reasons similar to mine. While women are often portrayed as secondary people, they do run most of the social networking, and they do choose which men they will empower.

I have had many dates since Carolyn died. At first, I thought I could attract a woman for a same gender, opposite sex relationship, but I failed multiple times. Some were interested at first, but they all backed out. I was not very observant at that time. I failed to notice how nervous the women were; I even drove two to start smoking again.

I'm not in a situation where a woman would be crazy about me and entice me to become a partner. Fortunately, this did happen once in my life with Carolyn.

If I had succeeded, I might have ended up with a woman obsessed with the fact I was not a cultural male, which meant she might constantly have attacked my state of being. However, my all my dating experiences were extremely insightful.