Trans Activism

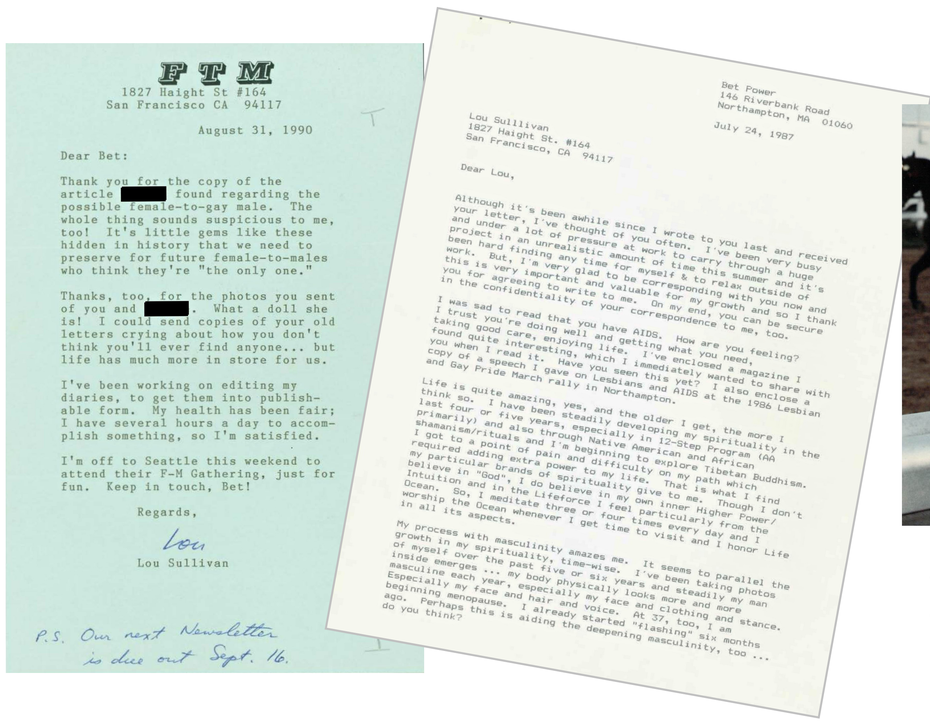
Remembering Lou Sullivan



Louis "Lou" Greydon Sullivan (1951-1991) was an activist and author recognized for his work to support transgender men, especially those who do not identify as straight. He identified publicly as a gay man and lobbied for social and medical recognition of gay transgender people, and was a contributor to today's standard of "orientation-blind" transition. In 1986, he was diagnosed with HIV, and he spent the last five years of his life informing his community and the world at large about the risks of HIV/AIDS as they pertain to trans men.

> *"They told me for many years that it was impossible for me to live as a gay man. Now, I'm going to die like one."*
>
> *Lou Sullivan*

In his activism, Sullivan advocated for individuals who faced barriers to medical transition, helping them find counseling, endocrinological services, surgery, and peer support outside of traditional avenues. Among other things, he helped found the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, wrote and published *FTM Newsletter*, one of the first guidebooks for transgender men, and organized monthly meetings where trans men could gather to talk about different issues. Through these avenues, he was able to spread information about how HIV/AIDS affects transmasculine people in particular, saving countless people. It is likely that Sullivan contracted AIDS in the early 1980s through still-healing incisions from a double mastectomy, known colloquially as 'top surgery.' If he had been better informed of the risks as they pertained to him, he might still be alive today.



F T M
1827 Haight St #164
San Francisco CA 94117

August 31, 1990

Dear Bet:

Thank you for the copy of the article [redacted] found regarding the possible female-to-gay male. The whole thing sounds suspicious to me, too! It's little gems like these hidden in history that we need to preserve for future female-to-males who think they're "the only one."

Thanks, too, for the photos you sent of you and [redacted]. What a doll she is! I could send copies of your old letters crying about how you don't think you'll ever find anyone... but life has much more in store for us.

I've been working on editing my diaries, to get them into publishable form. My health has been fair; I have several hours a day to accomplish something, so I'm satisfied.

I'm off to Seattle this weekend to attend their F-M Gathering, just for fun. Keep in touch, Bet!

Regards,

Lou

Lou Sullivan

P.S. Our next Newsletter is due out Sept. 16.

Bet Power
146 Riverbank Road
Northampton, MA 01060

July 24, 1987

Lou Sullivan
1827 Haight St. #164
San Francisco, CA 94117

Dear Lou,

Although it's been awhile since I wrote to you last and received your letter, I've thought of you often. I've been very busy and under a lot of pressure at work to carry through a huge project in an unrealistic amount of time this summer and it's been hard finding any time for myself & to relax outside of work. But, I'm very glad to be corresponding with you now and this is very important and valuable for my growth and so I thank you for agreeing to write to me. On my end, you can be secure in the confidentiality of your correspondence to me, too.

I was sad to read that you have AIDS. How are you feeling? I trust you're doing well and getting what you need, taking good care, enjoying life. I've enclosed a magazine I found quite interesting, which I immediately wanted to share with you when I read it. Have you seen this yet? I also enclose a copy of a speech I gave on Lesbians and AIDS at the 1986 Lesbian and Gay Pride March rally in Northampton.

Life is quite amazing, yes, and the older I get, the more I think so. I have been steadily developing my spirituality in the last four or five years, especially in 12-Step Program (AA primarily) and also through Native American and African shamanism/rituals and I'm beginning to explore Tibetan Buddhism. I got to a point of pain and difficulty on my path which required adding extra power to my life. That is what I find my particular brands of spirituality give to me. Though I don't believe in "God", I do believe in my own inner Higher Power/ intuition and in the Lifeforce I feel particularly from the Ocean. So, I meditate three or four times every day and I worship the Ocean whenever I get time to visit and I honor Life in all its aspects.

My process with masculinity amazes me. It seems to parallel the growth in my spirituality, time-wise. I've been taking photos of myself over the past five or six years and steadily my man inside emerges ... my body physically looks more and more masculine each year, especially my face and clothing and stance. Especially my face and hair and voice. At 37, too, I am beginning menopause. I already started "flashing" six months ago. Perhaps this is aiding the deepening masculinity, too ... do you think?



Ben Powers went on to found the Sexual Minorities Archive in Holyoke, Massachusetts, where he continues to serve as Executive Director. He donated all his correspondences with Sullivan to various archival projects to help preserve his legacy.

The AIDS epidemic made the queer community, especially queer men, more visible, but transmasculine people were not a part of public discourse surrounding it. Among themselves, discourse surrounding HIV/AIDS happened on individual as well as group levels, and often was interwoven with the exploration of one's gender identity in relation to others in their demographic. Networks coalesced in urban centers, but cross-country community formation expanded as well, exemplified by years of letters (above) between Ben Powers, a trans man living in Massachusetts, and Sullivan, who lived in San Francisco. Even as he took on more work, Sullivan made a special effort to respond to the letters he received from trans men all over the world, hoping to ease the isolation he had experienced in his transition.

> *"I wanna look like what I am but don't know what someone like me looks like. I mean, when people look at me I want them to think-- there's one of those people that reasons, that is a philosopher, that has their own interpretation of happiness. That's what I am."*
>
> *Lou Sullivan*



Issue 41 — June 199

FTMs and Hormon

Questions and Answers by Jed Bell

Angel and Buck Davis star in Alley of the Tranny Boys, a new porn video by C. Lee. At the Roxie, SF, June 27. Photo: P. Wise

FTM on FTM

by Alex Sousa and Eric Peterson

Alex: The first time I met Eric I was struck by how much I really liked this guy. There was something about him that really fascinated me, and at that time I could not figure out what it was. Since I have always been attracted to very feminine women, it was beyond my realm of thought that Eric could be a potential lover. I was stuck on being a heterosexual male at that time. I recall thinking to myself, after Eric and I had parted ways after our first meeting, that he was one of those people I wanted to know better. In essence, he was a "keeper" as a friend.

Roughly two weeks later we met again at a New Year's party in Long Beach. It was then that I realized there might be the potential for an intimate attraction to him. There was something provocative about him, inspiring about him; his energy was endless. He is a thinker, and gradually I found myself becoming attracted to him on a deeper level than just friends during the course of our weekend-long stay in Long Beach. It wasn't until the end of the weekend that I realized there might be something serious going on. The last night in Long Beach I remember a profound connection to his energy. It felt like we had known each other for a long time, and this weekend was our chance to rekindle a once-known fondness. There was something truly [illegible] the energy I felt, yet I remained stoic, [illegible] of voicing my attraction to him.

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Feature: BUTCH/FTM Day of Dialogue — see pages 4–5

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FTM INTERNATIONAL

F T M
ISSUE #2
DECEMBER 1987

DR. MICHAEL L. BROWNSTEIN TO SPEAK AT FEMALE-TO-MALE GET-TOGETHER #4:

Get-Together #4 will be held on Sunday, December 20, 1987 at 3:00 p.m. at the Chez Hollier Restaurant, 527 Bryant St., San Francisco. We are very excited to announce our special guest speakers will be Dr. Michael L. Brownstein and Dr. Michael L. Lisa DeRenzi. Dr. Brownstein and Ms. DeRenzi, his assistant, will give a presentation and answer questions on female-to-male surgical procedures. We KNOW this Get-Together will be very educational and worthwhile. You don't want to miss this one!

Nine FTM's (some just beginning their transition and several old-timers) and two friends came to Get-Together #3 held in September. There was much conversation and exchanging of phone numbers, our histories quite a bit about and we learned a show on Bay Area women who passed as men in the early 1900's, "She Even Chewed Tobacco."

If you would like to host a future Get-Together, know of a suitable meeting place, or have an idea for a speaker or program, please let us know. Get-Together #5 is planned for March 1988.

IF YOU HAVE...

...a little free time for writing
...an interest in working on the FTM Newsletter
...one free evening or afternoon per month to meet in a small group and work on the Newsletter

Contact Kevin at [redacted], or write us at [redacted].

Who knows? It could be fun!

MAGAZINE FOR F-M's

Metamorphosis Magazine is a fine quarterly publication primarily for the female-to-male. Each issue is approximately 24 pages and features articles on gender identity clinics, surgeries, personal profiles, book/film reviews, news excerpts, letters to the editor, and much more. Subscribe for $24 yearly to Metamorphosis Foundation, Inc., Box 5963 Station 'A' Toronto Ontario Canada M5W 1P4. Membership in the Foundation is $36 yearly and entitles you to additional items, including a contact list of other female-to-male members.

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Sullivan's experiences with transition, self-exploration, living as a trans gay man, and his eventual battle with AIDS are documented in his 24 diaries, which span from age ten until his death in 1991. He intended to publish his diaries to help spread awareness of transmasculine identities, but he never got to see the project completed. In 2019, his entries were compiled into a book titled *We Both Laughed in Pleasure: The Selected Diaries of Lou Sullivan 1961-1991*. Since most autobiographical works by trans people talk about transition in retrospect, Sullivan's diaries, which tell his story in real time, are an especially valuable source.

