

Branded T
by
Rosalynne Blumenstein, MSW

Reviewed by Dave Parker

Here is an unusual book. In simple terms, it is a personal transsexual experience. But it is so much more. It is the story of the transsexual experience on the streets of New York from the early 1970s through the beginning of the new millennium. It is the story of the sleazy side of New York during the same period, seen through the eyes and experiences of a transsexual. And, it is an inspirational story of a courageous transsexual person surviving the streets to become a highly-respected professional social worker and political activist.

Rosalynne Blumenstein was identified male at birth. She was introduced to shame by five years old when she dressed female with dress-up clothes provided in kindergarten. She left school and home at age 13, and spent the majority of her next 18 years working in New York's famous (infamous?) sex industry. She experienced life on the street as a prostitute, drug user, and peep-show girl.

Then she overcame her drug addiction. She returned to the peep show business clean for another seven years, supporting herself through college and graduate school with her earnings and scholarships. She was an early participant in the Gender Identity Project within Mental Health and Social Services at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center of New York. By March 1996, she became the first ever Director of the project.

The book is somewhat disjointed, making it difficult to read straight through. It is best read in segments, and is organized in a way to facilitate reading in that fashion. Life on the streets and in the clubs is related in great and intimate detail. Some will find both the language and discussions offensive, but it reflects the environment where Ms. Blumenstein spent much of her life. No one without this experience can really understand what it was like or what strength and courage it required to survive and overcome it.

As a volunteer at the Center, Ms. Blumenstein realized how out of touch she was without a formal education. She also realized that most of those she worked with were truly out of touch without her informal (street) education. Her collegiate success built on her transsexual experience to make her uniquely-qualified for her varied mental health and social services, especially for the marginalized members of our gender communities.

“This book is about pain, it's about celebration, it's about taking risks, its about going crazy, and it's about being fabulous and adventurous” It is an inspirational success story of a young woman originally designated male overcoming this incorrect designation, overcoming drug and alcohol abuse, and overcoming her life on the streets of New York to become a leader in HIV/AIDS prevention, education and outreach to all LGBT, and many other services to various marginalized communities.

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