

**Vivian Lopez**  
**Interviewed by \_\_\_?\_\_\_**  
**2004**

**Transcribed: Loren Basham**

**IN:** O.K. Vivian, let's start with one thing, where were you born?

**Vivian Lopez:** I was born in Nicaragua under the name of Rudy Lopez. And I knew I boys since I was four years old.

**IN:** Since you were four years old. Was there a specific moment that you remember...?

**VL:** No, I always played with the girls, I didn't play with boys. But I like the boys best, not the girls. But I liked the girls to played with.

**IN:** Did your family recognize this?

**VL:** No. They told me they knew of, the friends, the since I was born, but they never like, how do I say, like what did they see to what I was \_\_\_? \_\_\_. I guess that's not the right word.

**IN:** Did they share your feelings? Did they try to make you play with the boys?

**VL:** Well, actually, no. Never. They didn't. Whoever I wanted to play with..

**IN:** Oh, good. What about your, do you have any siblings?

**VL:** I have an older brother. I am the second oldest. And then I have another brother and a sister.

**IN:** How do your brothers...?

**VL:** My older brother is O.K. with it. And my sister's O.K., like my brothers look after me. She's not really one hundred percent supportive about it, but I mean, it's O.K. with her. My other two, my sister and older brother are one hundred percent. Like my grandmother, my whole family is. Everybody, cousins.

**IN:** When you were kids, how did your siblings, like when you wanted to play with the girls, how did your brothers handle that?

**VL:** They were O.K. with it, they never said anything. They just let me play with whoever I wanted to play with.

IN: \_\_\_?\_\_\_

VL: No. My older brother's friend kind of like made comments about it, but he was O.K. with it too. \_\_\_?\_\_\_.

IN: He made comments to your brother, or you?

VL: He made comments to him about me. But he didn't, he was O.K. with it. \_\_\_?\_\_\_.

IN: Why was....

VL: In fact he gave me \_\_\_?\_\_\_ when I was, before I came here I was about ten years old. Because I came here when I was eleven.

IN: You came here when you were eleven?

VL: Mmhuh.

IN: Why did you come here?

VL: Because every family \_\_\_?\_\_\_. Because there was war going on in my country at that time. So they didn't want, my family didn't want us over there because there were war things.

IN: Let me just ask you, in Nicaragua did you, how did they handle it normally. Did you know any adults who had, who were kept under or...?

VL: No, I didn't know anybody.

IN: No.

VL: No.

IN: And no one ever talked about it?

VL: Nobody ever talked about it, no.

IN: So when you were younger, did you just feel like you were a girl?

VL: Yes.

IN: You did?

VL: Yes.

IN: Like you would look at yourself in the mirror ....

**VL:** Yes, I looked like my mom. I had fantasies, well not fantasies, like dresses. But, I never said anything about it, they never did either, to me.

**IN:** What, about your dress up?

**VL:** Well, no, they didn't even know. Because they weren't there, but they knew that I was dressing. But they never said anything to me.

**IN:** About you \_\_\_?\_\_\_?

**VL:** But in secret, in secret. But \_\_\_?\_\_\_ scene.

**IN:** Did you think you would get in trouble?

**VL:** Yeah. In a way. They'd probably say, what are you doing wearing a dress. Or, you know.

**IN:** So did you have a feeling that something was wrong with you?

**VL:** I knew of this thing, because I looked like a boy, but I felt like a girl, you know, so I knew this weird thing going on.

**IN:** Did you have like a weird feeling about your appearance that you \_\_\_?\_\_\_ was going on?

**VL:** Well, I used to like look in the mirror and I used to say to myself, I want to have like a nice shaped body, like a girl's body. But I didn't have any problems with my body before, but I wanted it a different shape.

**IN:** What about in school, did you ever, do you remember any specific instance that stand out in your mind? You know, like in school.

**VL:** No, I always stayed with the girls, too.

**IN:** Really. Did the teachers ever say anything?

**VL:** No they.... Well, yeah. Not until middle school. One of my teachers asked me if I ever wanted to talk about anything, you know, that I could come to her. She was very supportive about it.

**IN:** Yeah, good.

**VL:** I think she knew. Because she told me that....

**IN:** Did you ever talk to her?

**VL:** No, I never did. I think the type of person that I keep things to myself. So I am like a shy person about my personal things, but, you know, when I was little.

**IN:** Did you ever think, after she said that, did you ever think, well, why don't I talk to her about.

**VL:** Well, I knew she was, that she knew and that she probably wanted me to express myself to her. Come up and tell her about my feelings and how I felt about my sexuality. You know. Stuff that she wanted me to talk about. But I'm a shy person so I...

**IN:** But you....

**VL:** .... But I didn't want to tell anybody.

**IN:** Right.

**VL:** No. Because I never told my family anything because they knew. Until high school, then I told my counselor.

**IN:** Oh, you did?

**VL:** Yeah and he was actually gay. So I felt more comfortable telling him. About my sexuality.

**IN:** Why did you...?

**VL:** I don't know. Because I knew gay and he would find it, yeah. He would understand more. I don't know, that's how I felt.

**IN:** During high school you moved out, to hang out with the girls...?

**VL:** I'd hang out with the girls and I had a gay friend. We used to hang out together. And I changed. He was good. I had never been to a gay bar. So he was the one who brought me to my first gay bar.

**IN:** Did you think you were gay?

**VL:** Well, I don't know. I knew I was a girl, I thought like a girl. But I mean I had never been to a gay bar. Which the girls and guys go. It was my first feelings in a gay bar.

**IN:** It was here in San Francisco?

**VL:** It was in San Francisco. It was the Esta Noche.

IN: Esta Noche?

VL: It was like a surprise. Because I had never been to one. So I was surprised.

IN: How old were you?

VL: I was underage. About nineteen.

IN: How did you, how did you dress then?

VL: I dressed like a boy.

IN: You did?

VL: Yes. Right up 'til I was twenty. Twenty-one when I started to change.

IN: Did you. When you went to Esta Noche did you see boys dressed like girls?

VL: Yes I did.

IN: How did you feel about that?

VL: I said when I dress up that's what I look like, I want to look like that. I want to dress like that.

IN: You did? Did you see a performance?

VL: I did, I saw the showing. It wasn't something that I wanted to do, it was just that \_\_\_? \_\_\_. I don't think I could do a show there. I wanted to look like that and dress like that.

IN: \_\_\_? \_\_\_

VL: That's right. Stop dressing like a boy.

IN: Did you feel, "Oh, this is what I am supposed to be?" Did you feel like that?

VL: Well I, no, I knew that that's the way I was supposed to dress, but I at the time I wasn't dressing that way.

IN: O.K. How did you feel when you saw that? For the first time. It was the first time you ever even knew anybody else that looks like...?

VL: I was like, Wow. Because they were so pretty what's there. I thought wow, that's how I want to look.

IN: O.K. so then what happened?

VL: And so I started going to, no actually no, I didn't go to no doctor, I started taking hormones by myself.

IN: You did?

VL: Yes.

IN: Where did you find that? Did you find out from one of the women?

VL: I guess I did. Actually, from my friend, the one who brought me there.

IN: Oh, O.K. So he knew.

VL: Oh yes.

IN: He knew. You talked to him?

VL: Yeah, yeah.

IN: O.K. He was like your best friend.

VL: Yeah. And actually, he, he was the one he started dressing up.

IN: Oh, he did too?

VL: He did, but he didn't go through the whole change. He just dressed up as a girl. Weekends. I started taking the hormones. I asked him, I told him, and he's like, Oh I can get you the hormones. Through a friend and so I did. And I started taking the hormones. By myself. But then I found out there was a clinic where I could go find a doctor who prescribed the hormones. So that's what I did.

IN: Are you done?

VL: Mmhuh.

IN: O.K., how is it that he knew that all you wanted to do was dress up like a girl and be done with it. You knew that you wanted to take the hormones.

VL: Because we had talked about it. And I had told him that I felt like a girl, that I wanted to look like a girl, that I wanted to have a girl's body. Like shape. And he had told me that he was comfortable being a gay boy.

IN: O.K.

**VL:** But he just liked to dress for fun. One the weekends.

**IN:** O.K.

**VL:** So that's how....

**IN:** And this all made sense to you?

**VL:** Yes.

**IN:** When was your first physical encounter? Do you remember?

**VL:** Potrero Shelter.

**IN:** Mmhum.

**VL:** I was getting involved.

**IN:** Getting involved. Do you want to talk about it?

**VL:** I was buying out \_\_\_?\_\_\_. And he was my brother's friend, \_\_\_?\_\_\_.

**IN:** Was he younger or older?

**VL:** No, he was older.

**IN:** Oh, your brother's friend. O.K. And how old?

**VL:** Sixteen, sixteen years old. And I was ten.

**IN:** What happened?

**VL:** Nothing, he just, I went to his house actually to look for my brother. And, I don't know, he just called me in, he just started touching me.

**IN:** He did?

**VL:** Yeah. And he showed me his part and everything. That was it, though. No being sexually ripe. You know?

**IN:** Yes.

**VL:** As well as gay intercourse or anything, nothing like that. Just like touching me. That was like my friend.

**IN:** How did you feel?

VL: I knew with men.

IN: He was gay?

VL: Mmm, a little bit. A little bit. But I was \_\_\_?\_\_\_ because I like it because he was a boy, I liked boys. So, but in a way I was. I was afraid that somebody might walk in and, you know, see me there.

IN: Alright. O.K. so let's go back a little bit, O.K. No, let me ask you one question. Did you do more things like that that \_\_\_?\_\_\_ like through high school or after that did you...?

VL: In high school yes.

IN: You did? Good.

VL: With boys.

IN: O.K. , the boys you went school with?

VL: Mmhuh.

IN: O.K. so you already knew?

VL: Yes.

IN: And then you \_\_\_?\_\_\_, did you think you were gay, or still felt, "I'm a girl?"

VL: A girl.

IN: What about boys, did they think you were a boy?

VL: I don't think they cared. I don't think they cared. How it felt, or.... Because I still looked like a boy to them, I was like a gay boy or something, than girls are. I never told them, oh I feel like this, don't look at me like this.

IN: It wasn't like that, it was just sexual?

VL: It was just sexual.

IN: O.K. so we go into this, then you took the hormones, and how did you feel then when your body started to change?

VL: Gay.

IN: You did? You started, what changed first?

VL: The face.

IN: That you're a girl then?

VL: My facial tissue started changing.

IN: How?

VL: Um, I don't know, my cheek bones, my whole face changed. And like this thing. More feminine

IN: More feminine. So do you have the same doctor?

VL: I still have the same doctor.

IN: Really. So he....

VL: Acne and everything. He treats me for everything.

IN: So he must treat you....

VL: Everything, the works.

IN: Even if you have a cold you go to him?

VL: I go to him.

IN: Where is the clinic?

VL: It's 150 Ivy Street. Called Tom Waddell Clinic. The Tom Waddell Clinic.

IN: O.K.

VL: The clinic.

IN: How long has that been around.

VL: Oh, it's been around for a long time, that I know.

IN: Did you meet other people at the clinic?

VL: I went through my change through my friend, with my friends actually here.

IN: O.K.

**VL:** We played Mardi Gras, \_\_\_?\_\_\_.

**IN:** O.K. So you all did it all ....

**VL:** Together.

**IN:** O.K. You knew them from Esta Noche?

**VL:** Actually, yes. I met them at Esta Noche. It was a beauty pageant. So we all participated ....

**[End of tape, side1]**

**[Tape, side 2, Vivian Lopez]**

**VL:** .... a fit of passion and so we met each other then and I said a fit of passion. We just kept in touch. Because he used to live in the Mission neighborhood, so. And then we started dressing up. This would be sort starting, for the homeless. And we started dressing up every weekend and then we went to the doctor and the hormones, the whole process together.

**IN:** So what was it like, the first time you dressed as a girl? And went out.

**VL:** To me, it was an awful lot of fun.

**IN:** It was an awful lot of fun?

**VL:** Fun. Yeah. We went to Synergy. (???)

**IN:** You did?

**VL:** That was like out "hang out" place. Synergy. (???) On the weekend. Now I don't go there that much.

**IN:** Now you don't go there very much.

**VL:** I just go to Finchley's (??)

**IN:** Where did you....

**VL:** I don't like \_\_\_?\_\_\_. I don't go there much at all.

**IN:** What do I want to ask you about, there was something. Oh yeah, O.K. you know the \_\_\_?\_\_\_, like drugs and whatever and how they can be catty and mean, and stuff like that. Did you find any of that at all?

**VL:** Well, that's the reason I haven't gone to the Esta Noche with Valetta. Like you say, "hitter."

**IN:** Hitter?

**VL:** Yeah. Hitters, that's why I don't hang out where a lot of transsexual girls hang out because there's a lot of drama and there's other kinds of trouble and hitters and that's why I'd rather hang out at straight places.

**IN:** What kind of drama?

**VL:** Like if people see you dress better than them or ....

**IN:** Oh the jealousy?

**VL:** ... jealousy type, if you're with a cute guy they will start trouble because they like the guy.

**IN:** Really? Start fights?

**VL:** Yes.

**IN:** Really? Do they try to just steal the guy, or?

**VL:** They will start their friends because they like the guy, they will start throwing attitude at you or some little things like calling stuff at you so that you can hear them and stuff. You know. Fight. That's why I don't hang out there.

**IN:** So when, O.K. When do you feel comfortable enough and to start going to straight places? It would be O.K.

**VL:** When I got my breast implants.

**IN:** O.K.

**VL:** Yes.

**IN:** How long did it take...?

**VL:** And that's when I felt I looked good enough to go to straight clubs.

**IN:** O.K. So start taking the hormones, how long before you got \_\_\_?\_\_\_?

**VL:** Let's say five years. I don't know. Four or five years. \_\_\_?\_\_\_ Between there. That's very firm because of the freedom, I was taking hormones since I was there. My

problems with the interns. But mostly when I looked good enough to go to a straight club.

**IN:** When did you relax. What made you think, or what made you know that you looked good enough to go over to a straight club?

**VL:** Because I was walking the street and nobody would make comments about me. Would think I was a girl. Guys would stop me to talk to me. I felt like I was good enough. So I went all these places, like straight places.

**IN:** When you were going through the transition did you have some of that like where people would actually believe that ...?

**VL:** To be honest, I have never had any problems.

**IN:** Really?

**VL:** I have never been called names in the street or anything.

**IN:** O.K. That's great. Do your friends?

**VL:** Yeah. Yeah, when we're down.

**IN:** Did you ever feel afraid?

**VL:** Afraid for them, yeah. But not for me.

**IN:** No.

**VL:** Mmhuh.

**IN:** So then you said something a little different. Let's talk about your, what you have done. We'll talk about that later.

**VL:** My nose..

**IN:** Did you have your nose done? O.K.

**VL:** My breasts. I don't think you're \_\_\_?\_\_\_.

**IN:** Just get comfortable.

**VL:** Other parts.

**IN:** You're embarrassed?

VL: Yes.

IN: O.K.

VL: My \_\_\_?\_\_\_, and other parts.

IN: Can I prompt you if you've had \_\_\_?\_\_\_? Are you totally a woman now, completely? You did have your male parts removed?

VL: Yes.

IN: You did?

VL: Yes.

IN: O.K.

VL: That'll be next.

IN: O.K. so you're definitely going to do that?

VL: Yes. That's why I live here.

IN: Do you have any fear about that?

VL: No because my friend, actually she just had it done a few months ago, not even a year and I've seen other friends that have already had it done.

IN: And so you don't fear it?

VL: No I don't fear it. I'm not afraid of it, having it done.

IN: This is a real question I must share. I have heard that some people who even go through the surgery like experience a great depression. Because they are not able to have children. And sometimes that is something that they really, really want. How do you feel about that?

VL: I'm O.K. with it. I know, I know that, well, there is no way back. But I could always adopt a kid, so.

IN: But you definitely want kids?

VL: Yes.

IN: And I don't know what the rules are on this, but after you've had the surgery completely, could you get married?

VL: Yes.

IN: You can?

VL: So you ...?

VL: I have already asked my lawyer.

IN: Really, so you have a lawyer also? And he told you?

VL: Yes.

IN: Jus to make sure everything is legal?

VL: He does all my legal papers. We had to change my name and all my other stuff.

IN: Really? Was there a community, kind of, that you had resources?

VL: Umm. At the same clinic, they will help you out.

IN: O.K.

VL: They help you change your name. The doctors, \_\_\_?\_\_\_, they change your name, \_\_\_?\_\_\_. But I did it through a lawyer. Because I know this person.

IN: O.K. How do you feel when you hear stories of Eddie Blyth?

VL: Just for sadness, like if .... It makes me mad because no matter what, I'm still \_\_\_?\_\_\_. That's not good enough to kill somebody. You know. \_\_\_?\_\_\_. I don't think that was enough reason for them to kill her. They could have just like, if it would have been seen as a guy, you know what would have happened to me, I would just say like, "just go away, just leave." But not kill the person.

IN: Right. Have you experienced any of that kind of violence. Or not for you specifically, I'm thinking of \_\_\_?\_\_\_. Or like with your friends?

VL: No. Not with my close friends, no.

IN: Do you feel like San Francisco is a really safe place?

VL: Yes.

IN: Yes. What is it like when you were like maybe a twelve year old boy who had, always felt like he's a girl?

VL: She should do like she feels inside. She should become like a girl she wants to be.

IN: What do you think like the surgery and insides and all that stuff, what do you think is the most important thing? Like when you had your breast implants and you felt more like a woman, right?

VL: Well, \_\_\_?\_\_\_ after that.

IN: Right.

VL: Because I already had breasts but they were not big enough. So I wanted a bigger size. I went and got 'em.

IN: Right. So when somebody is just transitioning, do you think that part is the most important? Or....

VL: To me is was not like, facial tissues, you know. Look more feminine. To me it was.

IN: You're different.

VL: Yeah.

IN: O.K. Do you ever meet \_\_\_?\_\_\_?

VL: No.

IN: No.

VL: No.

IN: You're happy?

VL: I'm happy. I'm happy. I don't miss it.

IN: Who are they \_\_\_?\_\_\_?

VL: Thank you.

IN: Is there anything else that you think that I should know about?

VL: Well now I'm going to, I'm changing religion. Well actually I'm changing three. \_\_\_?\_\_\_.

IN: From?

**VL:** From Catholic.

**IN:** From Catholic.

**VL:** Which is the same. People don't say, but it's the same. In Santa Maria (???) they have the same names. Which essentially the same thing.

**IN:** O.K. What made you make this decision?

**VL:** Because I was being, how do you say, not, I just did it because I knew I \_\_\_? \_\_\_. \_\_\_? \_\_\_. No I can't, I don't want say it. Because \_\_\_? \_\_\_.

**IN:** Change by it. Interested.

**VL:** Interested about it.

**IN:** Is it part of your culture?

**VL:** It is, actually. Yes.

**IN:** How do you identify, if somebody asks. You know in San Francisco there is this \_\_\_? \_\_\_ double \_\_\_? \_\_\_. Like you're out there and Umm, and Umm, you're a dyke, you're a fruit, you're fem, do you know what I mean? Like you're a daddy, whatever. How do you identify?

**VL:** I identify myself as a female.

**IN:** A female.

**VL:** Yeah. I don't like think transsexual, because it's not in my heart.

**IN:** Right. No, no, no, that's important because I think there's something that people want, it's true. I mean like you've felt.....

**VL:** That's how I identify myself.

**IN:** What about \_\_\_? \_\_\_. I know you have that sexuality it's not a sexual thing. You're so beautiful, so feminine. What happens now, when you are intimate with a man?

**VL:** Today is my boy friend. I have a boy friend now, two years. I used to have a boy friend before him for five years. So, I mean, as long as they're willing it's allowed, to me.

**IN:** Yeah. Let's talk about how do you get comfortable?

**VL:** Well, you know, of course they know.

IN: Friends? And when they see you, ....

VL: They don't know.

IN: Yes.

VL: They don't know.

IN: I wouldn't know.

VL: They don't know. So, but if I keep talking to them and getting to know them, I tell them.

IN: You do?

VL: When I see this going to a serious relation. So I tell them. If they're O.K. with that, it's fine with me. You know. And it's O.K. with them, it's O.K.

IN: Have you had times when it wasn't O.K. with them?

VL: Umm, yes. There was this one boy. He seemed very interested in me. He actually gave me this ring. I don't know

IN: \_\_\_?\_\_\_.

VL: I showed it to you. But then, when I told him, he was like, oh, O.K. you know, I think you're beautiful, this and that, but I'm not interested.

IN: O.K.

VL: And was that nice, or...?

VL: He was nice. He was nice about it. And I said "O.K., fine." And I still see him at the clubs and we're friends. That's what happened. Who knows what happened to him.

IN: Was there ever a time when you wouldn't tell somebody? You know, if they're not like a friend.

VL: No.

IN: No. \_\_\_?\_\_\_ O.K., so where do you see yourself in the next five years?

VL: In five years? Maybe married. Maybe with one or two little boys, or little girls. That's where I see myself in five years. Maybe less than five years.

**IN:** Maybe less, really? Are you and your boy friend now talking about marriage?

**VL:** Yes.

**IN:** Really? Oh, good.

**VL:** We are actually going to, well, we were going to get married then they cancelled the whole thing. Because I didn't want to wait, I wanted to marry him.

**IN:** Right.

**VL:** So it was going to be like a same sex marriage. Same sex. He was O.K. with it too. So then they cancelled the whole thing. We actually had our appointment, it was the 11<sup>th</sup>.

**IN:** Oh really?

**VL:** Yeah, we had the paper and everything. But then they cancelled the whole thing, so.

**IN:** Did he know you had so much surgery?

**VL:** And, forget that.

**IN:** Do you ever feels that you want to be.....

**[End of tape 1, side 2]**

**[End of recording]**