

Regina Elizabeth McQueen Interview

by Susan Stryker

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Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California
in cooperation with Joanne Meyerowitz, University of Cincinnati

Introduction

Regina Elizabeth McQueen (Gina) is an MTF transgendered person living in the Hayes Valley neighborhood of San Francisco. She was born in 1949 in Pennsylvania, and moved to rural northern California with her family when she was 15, in 1965. She began living full-time as a woman when she left home in 1967 to attend beauty school in Santa Rosa, subsequently making her living by day as a make-up artist at a Merle Norman cosmetics studio, and tending bar by night at the Monkey Pot, a gay establishment. She was accepted for sex-reassignment surgery at the Stanford Gender Dysphoria Program in 1969 when she was 19, but was asked to wait until she turned 21 before having the surgery. Due to struggles with drug and alcohol abuse, McQueen felt herself too dysfunctional to seriously pursue surgery for the next several years, and eventually gave up on the idea when she was 32, in 1982. McQueen had been the first Imperial Court Empress of Santa Rosa in 1971. She frequented San Francisco's countercultural scene throughout the early 1970s, and moved to San Francisco in 1975. She began taking hormones and attending various transgender support groups and social functions there by 1976. After becoming clean and sober in the early 1980s, McQueen embarked on a series of cosmetic plastic surgeries, and has worked on and off in the sex industry.

SS: So, Gina, why don't you start just by telling me your full name.

REM: All right. My name is Regina Elizabeth McQueen.

SS: So do you mind saying when you were born?

REM: December 19, 1949, Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Strict Catholic family. Interesting childhood.

SS: How so?

REM: Well, probably by the time I was five or six years old I was labeled "Susie," or "sissy," and got beat up regularly. All the way through school, my whole entire life, from first grade all the way up through high school, it was very apparent that I was very feminine, very nelly, and got punished for it. It was very rough. Hated school. Hated socializing with people my own age. That didn't work for me. It was rough. It was very ugly. It wasn't pretty. It wasn't natural. I became very militant at an early age. I started fighting back, you know, I didn't really mind being called the names, but I didn't like being hit. And as the years went by it wasn't just being ridiculed, but being hit, beat, raped, house being burglarized, just really being punished for being feminine.

SS: This was when you were a teenager, back in Pennsylvania?

REM: In Pennsylvania and in California.

SS: When did you move out here?

REM: We came to California when I was fifteen.

SS: So was it that your father got a different job, or what?

REM: Yes. We relocated out here, and it didn't change much. I had no support network except my family, growing up.

SS: How were they with you?

REM: Well, they did their best, you know? I mean, the reasons I got beat up and had all these problems was because I was feminine. If I wasn't feminine, and changed my attitude and my way of being, then this probably wouldn't have happened. And they realized that I couldn't change, that that wasn't who I was, and they were supportive, but they were kind of caught between a rock and a hard place. I mean, they weren't supportive because I was feminine, but because I was their child. They hated the fact that I was feminine, but they couldn't fix it, and they knew that neither could anybody else. They didn't punish me for it. I mean, every now and then they would say something because I was acting it out too much or something, but not a whole lot. They knew I was catching my lunch on a daily basis, so what was the sense? They knew that I knew what was going on. But it still continued. There was nothing they could do to stop it. I mean, in those days, like when I was six years old, when kids were like that they got hospitalized, institutionalized. They got psychiatrists, and if they persisted in being too weird or too strange, you know, lobotomies were legal then. I mean, the horror stories I know of people my age that have been transgender male-to-female, their parents threw them on hormones to make them more male, stuff like that. I was very blessed that I didn't, that my parents didn't. But believe me, they could have.

SS: So tell me, when did you start meeting other transgender folks?

REM: Probably when I was 21 [c. 1971], I met my first drag queen. I still hadn't met a transgender person yet.

SS: So that was after you had transitioned yourself?

REM: Oh yeah. I had been out since 1967, full time, living as a woman.

SS: So you were a teenager, and just got fed up with the abuse, and transitioned as a way of dealing with it, or what?

REM: I had always wanted to transition, from the earliest age I can remember I had a resentment that I was born at the wrong time, or in the wrong body. That I didn't like it. That it was ugly. It was cruel. I felt lost. And as the years went by, other things started happening. After

I did my transition I thought it was going to be really cool. I had read some--oh, for lack of a better term, some history books on transgender. People centuries gone by.

SS: Like what, specifically? What did you read that made you feel that perhaps you were not alone?

REM: Oh, I felt totally alone until I was probably, I would say, about 21.

SS: You just started to say that you had been books about people in other time periods. What--?

REM: Yeah, I got books at the library, and I told--talked to a librarian about some of this stuff, because I had been a librarian at my high school, and I said I needed to find out some information on folklore, and on transgender times throughout history. Like in the ancient temples to the goddesses, and all this. So there was a little bit of stuff that I had read--

SS: This is at the public library in Santa Rosa?

REM: Yes. And it wasn't enough, but it gave me the impression that we were great people, that we were sacred people, were important people to the tribes. That we were important to civilization, like a missing link between the sexes. That kind of stuff. So I had this fabulous impression that if people found out what I was, it was going to be cool. You know radical, right on, uh-huh. But this wasn't the case. This was in the days, I guess I was 18, 19, somewhere around in there, and I thought all this was really cool. Well, when I found out that people did not accept this--I lived up north in this cow town, in Santa Rosa. I mean, I had friends that did, but nobody really did. I mean, it was like "Yeah, yeah. You're here. We accept you." Well, no they didn't. It was, behind my back, "You're a freak." All that dishy dirty stuff. It was really dangerous to be a transsexual in those days. It was against the law. Still is, you know? There were blue laws on the books that they enforced. You know you had to have three pieces of male clothing on at all times. You could not get female ID It was impossible for a transgender person to hold down a straight job. But I did. I didn't know there was any other way.

SS: What did you do?

REM: Waitressed.

SS: So did you do this while living at home with your folks, or had you left home?

REM: No, I had left home to go to beauty school. Dad has split. Mom died. I was on my own. Had become a drunk. Drank myself out of two beauty schools, then somehow pulled myself together. Started waiting on tables. Advanced from waiting on tables to working in a strip club as a go-go dancer. Got out of that real quick, because that was an unhealthy environment. I would have gotten killed instantly, and nobody would have done anything about it. Went to work with Merle Norman Cosmetics Studio in Sonoma County.

SS: In Santa Rosa?

REM: Yes, In Santa Rosa. And I went to work in a gay bar. I held down those two jobs--the cosmetics studio and the bar--for, god, maybe five years? One at day and one at night.

SS: What was the gay bar?

REM: It was called the Monkey Pot.

SS: That was also in Santa Rosa?

REM: Yes. And eventually I became an Empress, blah blah blah.

SS: So you were in the Imperial Court System?

REM: Yes, I was the first Empress in Sonoma County. Hated it, though. Had no place. Had no time. Had no political clout. It was a joke, a scam. People thought it was irrelevant, at that time.

SS: Thought the Court System was, or you as Empress?

REM: Thought the Court System was. The whole Court System.

SS: So the Court wasn't that old at that point, was it? 1964, 65, somewhere around in there?

REM: Well, I was like 21 when I became Empress of Sonoma County, so that about 1970, that I was Empress. 70, 71, in there. People weren't taking gays, or any alternative--well, there wasn't any alternative. You were either gay or straight. Bisexual didn't exist, transgender they didn't want to see. So it was rough. And both gay and straight were very firm on this, that there was no such thing as bisexual. And there was no such thing as transsexual. You were a man, or you were woman. You were gay or you were straight. It was very black and white. They didn't like anything else. That caused way too much waves, brought way too much attention. They didn't like nellie, femmy gays. They liked manly gays that were not all that pronounced. I mean, for looks. The political movement was taking off. It was getting real tight. And feminine nellie men were not appreciated, nor were they welcome. Drag queens were not appreciated, not were they welcome. They needed good visual images for the straight world to see. And being transgendered, needless to say, was not one of those images. But needless to say, I was still doing it. I was wrong of course, they would tell me I was wrong for being the way I was, that I needed to be a man, that I needed to be a gay man. Period. This other stuff, you know, you don't need this. It's not natural. It's wrong. And these were gays saying this. I actually had straight friends, on the transgender stuff, who were more supportive than my gay friends.

SS: So you, while all this stuff was going on, you held down a straight job as a woman?

REM: Yeah, and remember, this was the days of big hair and lots of make-up, so it was just really a matter of how good you could put on your make-up. And I was young, and so it worked. I don't quite know how it worked. I mean, people just didn't know about it.

SS: I understand what you're talking about. I mean, my family is all from Oklahoma, and when I go visit--well, here in San Francisco, people always read me as trannie. When I go to Oklahoma, you know, it's just so damn easy.

REM: Yeah. I did this thing in Texas a couple of years ago. I mean, no make-up, no hair, no nothing, looking to the left. And just no problem at all.

SS: So had you heard about any surgical or hormonal possibilities, anything? Did you hear about Harry Benjamin's book when it came out in 1966, or hear anything about Christine Jorgensen?

REM: I heard about Christine, of course. I got hold of stuff, read about it. I thought it was very weird. You know--me, but still weird. Sort of sounds like me, wish it had happened to me. But she wasn't pretty. And she was old. She wasn't young. I was young. It was a role model, sort of. It's like, not who I want to be, not where I want to go, but it was somebody who went somewhere.

SS: Did you know much about what was medically possible, about changing bodies? Did you ever think about pursuing that?

REM: Yeah, early on I did. When I read her book, I wanted to be that.

SS: When did you first learn that surgery was possible?

REM: Whenever it was that her book came out. I remember that it was very scandalous.

SS: That would have been 1967.

REM: Yeah. It hit the newspaper stands, and it was big. And it was scandalous--you know, this is sick, this is wrong. Just sensationalism. People were blown away. It was very controversial. But that's how I heard about it. People talking, normal people. They're just "Oh, this is horrible!" And I'm like "Cool!"

SS: So was this before or after you started reading folklore?

REM: I guess I heard about Christine first. And then later on the folklore stuff. But I was still very confused. I hadn't met anybody yet. Nobody. And that was very weird.

SS: So you read the Jorgensen autobiography, had heard about that, were excited about that, did research on your own--

REM: Yes, did research on my own.

SS: --and was this about the time that you were getting into the gay bar scene?

REM: Well, before. The gay bar scene happened when I was 21, which would be 1970, 71. So this was before, 18 to 1971. And around 1971 and 72, the marches and all the political things, all this was going on, at least up north. The college campuses were abuzz with the ERA amendment

and all of that. That whole time period I was getting involved with--well, after I became an Empress, I didn't know what to do, we didn't have a rule book, and nobody around me knew. I guess in the City they knew what to do, but I wasn't plugged into that network. So I ended going to the college campuses, Sonoma State, the JCs, and giving lectures.

SS: Did you know somebody up there named Mildred Dikeman?

REM: No.

SS: She was an anthropology professor at Sonoma State. She's since started taking testosterone, is sort of transitioning. She had come out as a dyke in the 40s, and has told me how at the time there was no notion of transgender anything that she could find, but that if she had it all to do over again, she'd probably have transitioned earlier--you know, just been a man rather than a butch dyke.

REM: It probably would have been easier to just be a man back then. And transitioning was easier, believe it or not. I mean, it could still be really violent. You could get killed for it. It was ugly. It was just ugly. I mean, if you got stopped by the police, and they asked you produce three pieces of male clothing, and you couldn't do it, you went to jail. And we all know stories about jail. Some girls went and never came back. It was ugly. A horrible time of cruelty and punishment. On the evolutionary scale, anything, any color that was not cool to be, if it was a man, gay or straight, was above what I was. I mean there are ethnic things--whether it be Latino, or Black, or whatever it was that they happened to be beating into the ground then, they were still better than I was, because I was a freak. I had a real hard time. I mean, I didn't have a hard time living it, but I had a hard time dealing with other people's opinions of it. In the gay world.

SS: Was there a lot of segregation between your straight job, that life, and trying to find more of a community?

REM: Oh, I didn't have community.

SS: So what was the gay bar for you? What was it that drew you there?

REM: I was a drunk, a hard-core alcoholic, and I owed a bar tab. And they were having a big party, and needed somebody to cocktail. They hired me to do it to work off my bar tab.

SS: So you just happened to go into that bar the first time because it was just a bar, and you could drink there?

REM: No. Also because it was a gay bar. I was hoping that it would be something of a support network. And in a way it was. But I was still real uncomfortable with it. Because at that time the gays were still so anti anything different that I couldn't find any kind of comfort there. Straight people were actually more comforting. And besides, I wanted to be a woman, blah blah blah. And so it was like, "These people don't understand me because they're gay and I'm really straight. I'm a woman, and I just want to get married and adopt kids and settle down--all that transie dream. I think we're born with it. I think every transsexual has it. And even at that time, I still

hadn't met another transsexual. I had by then met a lot of drag queens who were really cool. They were fun, and they were supportive, but I hadn't met a transsexual.

SS: So you were meeting drag queens when, around 1968, 69, just after transitioning?

REM: Yeah, just after transitioning, so around then. And every now and then I'd make a trip to the city. Take in all the glitter and the glamour of San Francisco.

SS: Where were some of the places where you would go?

REM: Well, Polk Street was really really really happening then. There were places all down Polk.

SS: Remember any names of places?

REM: Oh yeah, sure. I remember the first club I ever went into in San Francisco that I thought was really happening was a place called--damn, I can't remember it! It was on Broadway, downstairs, underground, a kind of after hours club. And they had everything going on there. I mean, it was a very colorful scene. Very bohemian. Gay people. Straight people. Show girls. Show boys.

SS: This was in North Beach?

REM: Yeah--well anyway, that was the first place I ever went. And obviously this is before there's a Castro.

SS: Yeah, this is what I want to hear from you, where was Gay San Francisco then? Where did you go?

REM: Well, I didn't go anywhere South of Market. That was all leathery and rough and weird and uncivilized. This city was very split then.

SS: How so? What do you mean?

REM: Lesbians had their places. Drag queens had their places. Drag queens and transgenders were not allowed in certain bars. Period. It was a man's bar. You had to be a man, and look like a man, to be there. And a woman's bar--same deal. But the places that I went to were like Busby's, Gold Street, places like that.

SS: Busby's--where was that?

REM: It was on Polk Street. I went there. After I moved here, that's where I spent a lot of time, at Busby's. That was in 1975, around that time there. So it was colorful. Really cool--god, it was cool. So it was about 1975 and before that I would come on these little excursions, come to the big city to be wild and wicked and to live. You could walk down Polk Street and the whole street would be full of prostitutes. One side would be men standing out there posing, luscious little creatures--oh! And on the other side of the street would be women dressed in evening gowns

with feather boas and big hair and lots of make-up. And the next night, some of the boys would be over there on the other side of the street, in femme drag, and vice versa. It was colorful. It was fun. It was parties, house parties, all the time. Sausalito was happening. San Rafael was happening.

SS: Let me ask you about the house parties. House parties were especially big for African American queers because of discrimination in the bars and--

REM: Yes, that was certainly very true.

SS: --and I was just wondering if that was the same for trannies, like because they couldn't go into a lot of bars.

REM: Well, no, because there really was no such thing as a trans community. There was none. At all. None. The gays had SIR. I was a part of that--well, not really a part of that, but participated. I was a member. The Society of Individual Rights. I didn't find out about doctors, about using doctors to get work done, or for hormones or anything like that, for --gosh, maybe around 1976. I guess after I had been here in San Francisco for about a year. I went to the Center for Special Problems and got on a hormone called DES--diethylstilbesterol, which then became an illegal hormone. Never once was I tested. Never once did I have blood drawn. They never did any sorts of follow-up with any of the people that took that hormone. You just got what you got. They had sliding scale. They had therapy. There was some other groups that were happening--oh, just down the street from here, something, a transgender group that, now what was it . . .

SS: Well, there was one transgender group that had started back in 1967 at Glide, this thing called Conversion Our Goal.

REM: No, that wasn't it.

SS: Then there was the National Transsexual Counseling Unit, that was run out of the Anti-Poverty Office. Eventually that was down on Third Street, by the old Mattachine.

REM: No, this was just down the street here.

SS: There was something over on Turk, the Helping Hand Center.

REM: Hm, no, this was around Polk and Van Ness. It had a funny name. They had an office. I belonged to it for a while.

SS: Was it Janus? The Janus Information Facility? That was around in the mid 70s.

REM: Might have been. Something like that. And then there was a couple of transvestite groups that also had transsexuals in it.

SS: Remember any of those?

REM: God, no, even though I belonged to one.

SS: There was Golden Gate Girls and Golden Gate Guys. ETVC didn't come along until a little later, around 1980.

REM: Yeah, that was later. This one was before that. God.

SS: There was the COITS, but that was a little different, more of a drag debutante ball sort of thing.

REM: No, this was transvestites.

SS: Hets rather than drag queens?

REM: [Nodding yes.] Came with their wives and girlfriends.

SS: Tri-Ess--The Society for the Second Self?

REM: Gosh, I just don't remember. It's been so long now. I did that, but didn't like it at all. Not at all. Thought it was just too weird. Because I got hit on, see? I mean, I didn't mind everybody looking pretty, but those girls liked other girls. And that warped me. I didn't know about that. That was just too weird. I couldn't even understand that. I mean--I had problems with guys liking me. I thought it was wrong. I believed that for many, many, many, many years. After I made the transition, anybody who wanted me was sick in the head. And even if anything ever came of it, it was just wrong. It would have been OK if I had got my surgery, but it was like, preoperative, anybody who wanted you was really gay. And they just didn't know it, but if you didn't know it, then you were sicker than they were. And so, I had a lot of issues, issues that were handed down to me from the gay world, and the straight world, and from everybody that had an opinion. Because god knows, if you don't know anything about anything--and you really don't know anything about anything--then whatever you hear, you kind of take that as a fact. It's like "Oh, OK. Well, that doesn't seem very fair, but I guess it's right." You know, it's wrong, but it's right. They're right and I'm wrong. Guess I'll just die and go straight to hell for it. And probably would have at that time. So I couldn't find any place to get any real good support. So that's why I went to Center for Special Problems, and that's where I first started meeting other transsexuals. I would say around 1975, 76 is when I was going there. I liked it there, it was cool. Little chat groups, girls just talking about their stuff. God, I was a star, because I had held down a straight job for years. You know, this was like a major feat in their eyes. I'd never really thought about it. You know it's like--what else do you do? Sunday night you're a boy, Monday you want to be a girl. How do you live? Well, you get a job. You know? You just get a job. So I got a job. I went out and got a job. I put on my make-up, did my wig, got into some cute clothes, and just hit it. Walked out and applied for some jobs. Got one. Didn't know that there was any kind of obstacles to overcome. When I was young, I had no idea. Now I look back and think I was rather insane. Well, naive. Rose-colored glasses, all that junk. But I did it. I was ballsy and just did it. I did it naively. I mean--coming to the city and becoming a prostitute, I'd never even heard of that. So it was like, there was no other option. Just get a job.

[break in taping]

REM: OK, so where were we?

SS: You were just telling me about getting a job, and about being at the Center for Special Problems, and not realizing that there were obstacles a lot of transgendered people faced in finding employment.

REM: Right. I didn't, I really didn't understand, that we just weren't supposed to be able to do all that stuff. I didn't know any better. So, it's like if you don't know any different, then you just think that's natural. And I would still tell anybody, anybody in any walk of life and any way, shape, or form, that if you really really really want a job, then you can just go and get a job. Or you get a check. You get whatever it takes to get yourself from A to Z. You want to support yourself, then you got to get a job.

SS: So, you had this job in Santa Rosa, this was the town that you moved to when you were fifteen? So people knew you there?

REM: No, actually, I lived in Ukiah when I was fifteen. But I wanted to go to beauty school, so I moved to Sonoma County, which had the closest beauty school. I just did it. And after beauty school, I just totally dropped out. Everyone in beauty school totally thought I was a girl. White hair, long gold nails. I pushed the envelope, as they say now. I did more than push it.

SS: So part of transitioning, when you started that, was getting out of your family, getting yourself to a different town?

REM: Well, my family was all gone by this time.

SS: Your Dad was gone, your Mother had died, you said.

REM: Yeah. I was all alone.

SS: No siblings?

REM: They were all back East. So they were all gone, and I had a clean slate to start over with. And I just did it. And I did it well. It really worked for me. I did fashion shows, those sorts of things, for Magnin's. They never knew. I was a customer, you see, and back then, once a year, they'd throw these little parties for their best customers, the pretty ones, the ones with the best bodies, or the highest-paying customers, they'd be invited to do these little shows. You'd walk out in these expensive designer dresses, do your twirl, and then you're done. It was kind of a campy thing, but it cut down overhead and built up business. And it was just this nice normal thing that women did. And I got invited to do it because I was a good customer. I liked it, liked being on stage. I like drag shows. I became a stripper.

SS: When did you first start doing drag shows?

REM: In the gay bar, there in Santa Rosa. It was kind of mandatory. You know--you're a queen, this is what queens do.

SS: So in the straight world you were a woman, but in the gay world you were a queen.

REM: Exactly. I was a freak.

SS: So you weren't passing to the extent that--well, there wasn't any place you could go as a woman and feel accepted?

REM: There was just the one gay bar, and if you went there, and you were a woman, then you were either a drag queen or a fag hag. There was nothing else.

SS: So I'm just wondering why you kept going to the bar. I know you said it was because you were an alcoholic and were drinking, but--

REM: And after awhile it became a job.

SS: Yeah, but did it become a way of trying to figure out something about yourself, who you were?

REM: No--I was totally confused. At that time I worked there every night, I hustled my way into working there every night, well, almost every night. And when I wasn't there, I was out trying to live a life. I was in straight bars, picking up straight men. I could do it. Some I would lie to, some I would tell the truth to. And you know, more times than not, it was received very well. Maybe it was received for no more than about an hour, but it was still received. But I say "a straight lifestyle" and I don't even really know what one is. My conception of what one was then, and what I now think one really is, are very different.

SS: Like how?

REM: Well, then it was real redneck. If you were straight you were straight you were straight. You went to church, blah blah blah. You didn't hang around with anybody colorful or avant-garde. None of that. You were just square. You bought the rule book, you read it, you memorized it, you lived it. Nothing weird, nothing out of line, just boring. Then, the minute you start crossing over the line, into any sort of alternative lifestyles, you were bohemian. That's what a straight person became. Later on I went into a very straight life style and ignored it all, ignored everything. My first boyfriend that I had as an adult didn't want to have anything to do with that, so we lived a very straight lifestyle--except that it was consumed with alcohol and drugs. I don't know. I didn't have a lot of support systems with all that stuff. It's like, by that stage of the game it didn't matter what anybody thought, what the rules of the game were. It just didn't matter anymore. It was all about what I wanted, and fuck the world. When I realized that I could get killed for what I was--and I realized that as a child, but when that really clicked in--I started to live life very recklessly. Whatever I wanted to do I just did it, and whatever price was to pay I just paid it. I became very bitter and resentful. I was a daily alcoholic and a daily drug addict. I was full of hatred and bitterness and rage and resentment and more resentment. And confusion--because, you know, you gotta be right once in a while about something, you know? I mean, you got to be right once in a while. You can't always be wrong all the time. And everything about me, somebody saw it as wrong. I was just wrong. And I just decided I wasn't gonna buy that anymore. I just wasn't gonna care anymore. By that time I had beaten a lot, raped a lot. Life

seemed really short then, because at any moment I felt I could be killed for wearing a dress. So if I felt like being in Sausalito one day, then like it or don't like it, it doesn't matter, that's where I'm going to be. And then I got it--you know, finally, a miracle, a light bulb, all that good stuff. You gotta be who you gotta be, do what you gotta do. Because life is short. And now that you've got that understood--live. You were born to live, and then you die. So live while you are living. It clicked. Things got better.

SS: When did that happen for you?

REM: Late. Way late. Way, way, way, way late. Almost too late. I would say that when it really clicked in I was in my late 20s, and I took it on as a lifestyle, a religion, whatever, after I got sober when I was 32. I just said, "Oh, Mary, the church don't like me, the government don't like me, society don't like me, fags don't like me, my own kind don't like me--Oh well. I like me. Kick ass." And I did. I kicked ass. I rode with bikers. I was a stripper. Whatever whim--I did it. Auntie Mame lived. She just got unglued inside me. Everybody has got an Auntie Mame character inside them, and mine just popped out, kind of a cross between Auntie Mame and Anna Madrigal, and just said, "Dust. Eat my shorts. Blow me. If you don't like me, you can just fuckin' blow me." And that was kind of my philosophy. I didn't pick on anybody else's stuff, but the minute anybody started picking on mine it was time to box. Because of my alcoholism before I was 32, which was really intense, I had developed attitude. And I was real redneck. In my book it was OK for me to be who I was, and what was not OK was for anyone to judge it. And when they did, I'd fight. This sissy would fight. She got butch and she would kick ass. And the more ass I kicked, the more I realized that there wasn't that much ass to kick--you know? It's like, well there's always one, so just get rid of it at the beginning. Seek and destroy. Move on. Start living. All those bullies stopped being bullies when they realized that I was just not going to go away. And when society really realizes that society is not going away, when it realizes that there are more minorities than there are quote "normal folks," just more avant-garde colorful people in the world than there are normal folk, then they are going to get really scared. When they realize that there are more different colors on the planet than there are white people, they're going to freak. When you add the Latin, the Black, the Asians, the mixes, and get them all going on--there's way more of them than the white folk. As a collective. There are more women and children on the planet than men. There's more of everything than that quote "white capitalist straight male." That's the tiniest minority in the world, that little group. Especially here--there's more of everything here than them.

[break in taping]

SS: So, you started at the CSP in 1975, 76 or so. Did you ever think about doing surgery?

REM: Yeah, I was going to do surgery. The years had been going by, and I wanted surgery, wanted surgery, wanted surgery, wanted surgery. And then when I got sober, and looked again at the question of surgery, I realized that that was just another way to keep me down. It's like "Honey, don't pretend to be something that you are not." It was like, for me to be normal and right--or normaler and righter--I had to go and get surgery to alter down there to fit in. And I looked at that, and said "You are too goddamn old to worry about fitting in anymore. You are 32 years old. You are too old." It was like "You've got it and never used it, not really. Maybe you should experience this." And I was honest about it to myself. I experimented. And finally I just

said screw it--I am who I am and I like it that way. And the idea of having reassignment, I just blew that out of the water. I realized it was the same game that gay people were playing on my head when I was younger, and straight people, telling me that I had to have a place to fit in. Well, no I don't. I'm alive and I'm on the planet, and that makes me fit in. I don't have to fit a stereotype, I don't have to fit a mold. I don't have to get it cut off to get a pussy to fit into straight society which I'm never going to fit anyway. Because any man that you'd find, you'd have to tell them. Because if you don't somebody's gonna. So--all that stuff.

SS: Do you take hormones?

REM: Oh, yeah. I've been on hormones for years.

SS: When did that start?

REM: When I was at Center for Special Problems. I went on DES.

SS: Right, you mentioned that.

REM: And other stuff, too. I took Estinyl, Provera, Premarin, all that. I've been on hormones for years. Mostly, most all of the time, since then. But since age 32 I've had my whole body redone--I've had my face done, my nose done, my breasts done, my hips done, my legs done, my ass done.

SS: So you've had a lot of plastic surgery, but just not genital surgery.

REM: Right. Just not genital surgery. It's just not necessary. It's not necessary to fit into society. But you have to be able to stand in front of the mirror and love who you are, inside and outside. I did mine purely for cosmetic reasons. I was older, and I just wanted to look--

[end of tape]

SS: So we were talking about body alteration.

REM: Yes. I was reinventing myself. I had decided that I wasn't going to be a woman, so I might as well be a sex goddess. I was going to be pretty. I was going to give it the best shot I could give it. And I did it. And it was fun. At the same time, I decided that if I wasn't going to be a woman and be a sex goddess instead, that I was also going to be a sex worker. I was just going to try it out. I didn't want to be in a relationship, didn't want a boyfriend, didn't want a girlfriend, didn't want to be married. I thought, "It's better to be a whore than a slut." But there I was, a 32 year-old ex-housewife, just got out of a sick relationship, kicked heroin and speed and alcohol and a husband. Thought: hate men, love cock. Broke. Young men paying a hundred dollars a throw. Ha! Sounds good to me. Did it. Enjoyed it. Did it for a couple of years. Quit for a couple of years. Got a job. Went back to doing it again. Quit again. You know how it is--back and forth, back and forth. But I love it. In a heartbeat, somebody young, 22, gorgeous butt, sexy, wants me, gotta have me--yes he can have me, for the right price. It makes it worth it, when I'm pushing 50. Ego building and boosting. At 22 it might be degrading. Might be very degrading at 22. But pushing 50, it's groovy, and I'm just sorry if you don't think so.

SS: Was it hard for you to get the surgeries that you wanted? Did you have any trouble working with the surgeon, or finding one?

REM: No, I did a lot of research, a lot of research. I've not had one problem with anything I've had done. I've had one doctor, very reputable, went, checked out all his stuff, you know, I guess I just did a lot of research, and found this one doctor, he's done all my work.

SS: So did you do that here locally, or did you have to go elsewhere?

REM: No, over in San Leandro. I started doing that--oh, like I said, when I was 32, like 15 years ago I started having my first silicone injections in my face, because half my face had been caved in. I started going for it. It was just one of those things, where you say "You know, you could drop dead tomorrow." Try to become at least the illusion of what you want instead of a bitter old shell because you can't. I did, and I liked it. I became even more comfortable as the years have gone by. After I got sober--I had a rough year, that first year, but after that I kind of came to grips with it all. I just said, "This is the hand I was dealt, this is what I have in fact chose to be dealt. This is what I like. This is who I am." And did it. Just did it. You know, this is your only life, so have whatever hair color you gotta have. If you want both, go get it. If you want one of each, if that's what's really gonna make you a better person, a better citizen, what ever, just whatever makes you you, just do it. Make that change.

SS: Did you have to get any psych referrals to do the surgery that you wanted, or was the surgeon willing to work with you?

REM: He was just willing to work with me. I'd already been transgendered so long that there was no reason why not to. So I didn't have any problem with that. But we talked immensely about size--the size of this, the size of that. I didn't want anything huge. I've got a 35 and a half rib cage, and a B-C cup, which brings me up to 40 inches, 38 inches nipple to nipple, 28 inch waist, and 40 inch hips. 140 pounds. It's cute. I mean, it's more than cute. It's good, it's very good. No fat, no flab. Walk a lot, exercise a little. I feel good most of the time, and eat whatever I want. I like it just the way it is. It would have been easy for me to come out, if I was young, at this time. Because there's more knowledge, more information. When I was 19 I went to Stanford for my first interview, to get reassignment surgery, and I passed, to get it, but they wanted me to wait until I was 21. And I kept on thinking about it--this is what I want to do, this is what I want to do--but then I never did it. And I began to think that maybe there was a very good reason why I didn't do it. You know? I wouldn't want to be just a woman. They don't have it so good at all. Babies. Husbands that beat 'em. Other women trying to get their husbands away from them. I mean, a woman's life is not glamorous. It's not exciting, a normal woman's life. And there is nothing normal about me, so why should I go for that, when it's not really me? I just like it where it's at. This is comfortable for me.

SS: So you decided that getting genital surgery would be opting for a more normal life?

REM: It would be a betrayal. Buying into a system that doesn't work for anybody. The idea that any person has to have any kind of surgery to fit into a society--huh-uh. That's not right. Now, if you want surgery, for you to fit into your skin, that's another story. That's an elective thing. That's

something that you want to do for you. But to fit in? No, I don't think that's right. For you to fit into you, that's a groovy thing.

SS: I was just asking, because it's obvious that you're making a distinction between some kinds of surgery and others, and was wondering what your thinking was on that.

REM: When I decided to do all of this other stuff, this surgery, it was strictly for money. I knew men liked it more. It was a money-maker. Tits are always a money-maker, you know? That's what men like. And I've got them because of that.

SS: But do you like having them?

REM: Oh, I love them. They're beautiful. But you know, I don't trip on them. I don't trip on any of it.

SS: Same with the face stuff, the rest of it?

REM: Yeah. I don't trip on it. When the make-up is on, it's on, and I don't stand in front of the mirror. I don't. It's actually difficult for me, because half of my face used to be caved in, and I still see that. So it's that I don't like what I see, although I know that what I see is not what I'm looking at, you know? There's a difference. It's like if you've always been fat and you suddenly get skinny, you still see yourself as fat. When you see a big old ugliness about your face, like the whole side of your face is caved in, well, you look at that and go "Eegh!" And even though you've had that fixed, there are those days when the picture you get back is something you don't want to see. But that's not what you see when you put on your make-up. It's like, if you have facial hair, and you're painting your face, you see that. I couldn't deal with that--had it all ripped out, waxed my face every day for ten years.

SS: Didn't do electrolysis?

REM: Tried it once, scarred. So I waxed every day, just ripped it right out. Ten years straight. I don't have hardly any hair left on my face, maybe 30, 40 hairs, and I tweeze those. I wax when I have to go do something really special. But that's what I was all about, glamour and beauty. That possibility. That's what my life was all about. Now it's not, it's really not. Now I don't care. Most of the time I run around without any make-up, looking to the left, walking my dog--I just don't care. Somebody says "You a man or a woman?" I say "I'm a man. Now leave me alone." I don't want to play, you know? "I'm a man. Does that work for you? Oh, it doesn't? Well then what does work? What will work to make you go away? Because I'll be that. Woman? Hermorphodite? Whatever it takes." You know that old line: is it real, or is it Memorex? It's Memorex, %100 simulation of who know what--but it's cool. It's still marketable. And I like that. I have a blast. But it took a lot to get there. It took a lot of deprogramming. And I think what it would be like to live in a society where everything was cool and groovy, like we like to think it could be, and I don't know if I would have ever done any of this stuff. If it was OK for me to be what I was at six, I don't know if I'd be here having this conversation today, looking the way I do now. But it wasn't OK, and this is the product of it. If it was OK to be gay or androgynous or whatever growing up, if kids could see that, then they might not end up like this. They might say cool, it's groovy just the way I am. Bingo. Deal. I'm masculine, feminine, none of the above, all of the

above, whatever. But it wasn't cool back then. None of it was. Nothing was cool. Now it's just more cool to be yourself. I love being me. I don't have to fit. I fit just by my being. I don't do a lot of stuff that's considered political. I just don't get involved in that stuff. Now it's all about art, and looking at the battles I want to fight. You know, life is war--right, got it, now which battles do you want to fight in life? There are those days when somebody taps you on the shoulder and says "Hey buddy!" Well, that may be a good day to fight, but then you think, is this a good battle for the here and now? No, probably not. but then you go into the hospital, where you are paying thousands of dollars for being taken care of, or you have Medi-Cal, or whatever, and some tacky nurse says "excuse me, sir..." after you just had \$60,000 worth of surgery, well, then you just might have a right to have a battle. And you deserve it. It's not about how well you fight. It's about winning. If they are bigger and badder and stronger, you are going to lose. But if they are not, and they've done something to degrade you, then you have a right to fight. But do it right. Giving her a swift knock would feel good, but there are channels. Lawyers. TV, Newspapers, Where ever you feel like taking it. That's what I mean about picking your battles. You know, if there was a firing squad outside tomorrow, and all transgendered people had to get in this line, all going to get bumped, I'd be one of the first ones in line. Just because that's where I belong. I'm not going to hide, go under a bush, try to go over to the other side, pass. I don't care about passing anymore. I don't. It's not worth it. The deception of trying to fit in, to pass is wrong. It's wrong, it's wrong. It causes people heartaches, trying to pass. You know, the pretty girl who passes, everybody says oh, she's got it made. Not really. Then you've got the ugly country bumpkin who \$100,000 worth of surgery is not going to make her pass, sure everybody at first is all over her--rerr, rerr, rerr--but then it's "Oh, why pick on her?" She's got it made. Everybody knows what she's about, and they let her alone. But the pretty one, when they find out she's been passing, she's the one who loses her home, her job, her family, her cars, that other stuff. So I say sure, be beautiful, that has it's perks. But more important, be real. And by that, I mean be real to yourself.

SS: Even if it's Memorex.

REM: Even if it's Memorex. Just own it. I was not pretty. And that's OK. I'm a surgery queen. It's something to do. It's fun. I like it. It works for me. I like the idea of having so much done that I don't have to wear make-up any more. I hate thick foundations. I had the beard yanked out because I hate thick foundations. Now when I do something special, a show for friends, whatever, then out comes the tackle box and on it goes. I wear everything in it, and love it. It's fun. Drag is fun. Any kind of drag is fun. Dressing like a harem dancer and coming to Magda's on Monday night and serving tea is fun. It's drag. Dressing as a lady construction worker and coming to Magda's on Wednesday night and serving tea is fun. Corporate drag is fun. Whatever it takes to get you through it, and have a good time doing it. I don't like the limiting factors that people put on themselves. I hated the fact that I put a lot of limitations on myself growing up. But I don't any more. Now I pick and chose my battles.

SS: Well, that certainly sounds like a great way to live a life. Um, if you don't mind indulging my history geekiness here for just a minute, could you tell me more about, I'd like to hear more about that period when you were first transitioning, up to say 1975 or so. What the connections were between Santa Rosa and San Francisco--and the Court System.

REM: The Court System is tired and boring.

SS: Well, what I'm asking is whether you saw it as tired and boring in 1971.

REM: Yes, it was then, and it still is now. But, on the other hand, I say that because it's not my thing. And the first few times I came to the city, for the big balls--oh my god, girl, it was unbelievable.

SS: What was it like? And which balls did you go to?

REM: All of them. The Empress Balls, the Black and White Balls, the Court System Balls, everything--the dresses, the costumes, the sets, the music. It was like "Whoa!" It was like what you thought Hollywood could be. There was one I went to in this Marie Antoinette period thing, with hoop skirts and powdered wig, all that, and--oh my god, it was just incredible. The ambiance, the magnetism, the energy. The glitter, the glamour. They were all that way. And there was gays so I didn't like it all the time. Sometimes I hated going. But I always knew that by the end of the evening I would have had a wonderful time. It was really incredible. The movement, the political stuff, too. We lived with the fear that somebody could just come in to one of those balls with a gun, or one bomb, and boom! it would all be over. It would be gone, fairy dust everywhere. Didn't stop anybody. Didn't stop me, certainly. I was for it. I was really for it. I figured if straight people, bi people, gay people really got their shit together and acknowledged that they were each cool, happening choices, then they could all look at me and say, "Well, of course you're cool girl. If we've got a place, you've got a place." Well, they didn't, and I did anyway--in spite of their turmoil. You know, I always tease myself with this one, would I like to be young again, today? Not really. It wouldn't be any fun. The life I wanted then I could have now, but it wouldn't be any fun. Living through that experience made me a better person. It ain't ever going to be that way again for anybody. It was the period. Like in the 20s, gay or straight, everybody had to deal with Prohibition. they were being decadent for that time period. We were being decadent for our time period. Well, we were decadent for everybody's time period. But the parties--the parties were like they are now. They were very mixed. You were either in or you were out. And if you were in, it didn't matter what you were, gay, straight, bi, or trans. You were hip. It was kind of a collage--gay bohemian. And now it's broadened out even more. I wish I could tell you more. It wasn't a great big mass of sex orgies. People think that's what those parties were back then, and that's what some of them were. But that's not what was going on. Not a couple of hundred people doing it. Sure, a couple of people in the cloak room, or in a locked bedroom, there was always that. And always a couple of people shooting up, but not everybody. That was not what it was about. It was actually kind of wholesome. It was very nurturing, that you just fit, because you belonged. Like, "Oh, you're Black, so what? You're trans, so what? You're pinko, so what?" If you were an asshole you were out, and if you weren't you were in. If you could hang with everybody else's shit you were in, and if you couldn't you were out. You were groovy or you weren't. Those were the kinds of people I chose to hang out with. That's what the movement was like here.

SS: But you also talked earlier about being a redneck up in Santa Rosa, and how straight even the gay culture was. So when did the counterculture really hit for you? The hippie scene--is that ever what you were involved with?

REM: Yes. Hello. It was. I had really long hair, and it was fun to paint something on it, half a butterfly or whatever, throw some glitter on, some wild bodacious mod clothes, go out and smoke dope in the Haight. It wasn't about your crotch or your color. You were cool or not cool. It was very political. And musicians. Older people and younger people--and even younger people. Real young people. It was really cool. Stuff you see on TV now, when they do these flashbacks to the 60s and 70s? Huh-uh. Tales of the City? Excellent, but not quite--it was all that and more. More. It was much more intense for everybody. And really fucking groovy. You'd just come to the city, and you'd know people. "Oh--tonight's the opening of Jesus Christ Superstar, do you want to go?" "Well, I just got to town, and I didn't really bring any money, and I don't have anything to wear, and I'm having a poor period right now." Or ""Sure, I've got some money, but I don't have anything to wear." Well, in a few minutes you'd be dressed, and you'd be going--and you'd go in a group. People cared. They really cared. This city was wonderful. It was really kickin'. And Berkeley was kickin' it, too, even though they were a little [lifts nose in air]. They were always that way, always a little [lifts nose in air]. But on the flip side of that, they could look down their noses at a whole lot of people, because they were like "We're here. We're the intelligent. We're the educated set, and we're the political set, and we're the rebel rousers, and--." Hell yeah, they were out. Very out and very political there. And it was radical. Guys would be walking down the street holding hands. Women would be going down the street holding hands. And you'd think no, that can't be, but it was.

SS: Did you run around at all with the Cockettes?

REM: No, I know some of the Cockettes now, but I didn't really run around with them then. Michelle was in the Cockettes. Bambi Lake, later. She had come in, was around the same arena of people. Yeah, I knew those people, but when all that was going on, I was coming out of my political phase more, and wanting to be more mainstream. Didn't want the life at that time, wanted to be more normal, more calm. And I couldn't, because I was still drinking, still doing the drugs. But I still wanted that more calmer life, holding down a straight job, whatever it was. Boyfriend, blah, blah, blah. I just didn't want all that other stuff. Been there, done that. I was through with that. And basically I was. I started calming down more. I started realizing that there were a lot of good things to get out of life, and one of them was peace of mind. And another was a good healthy lifestyle for me to grow up in. I needed to grow up one more time. You know, I'm at that place again--what are you gonna do when you grow up? I don't know. Something else. Which is cool. I don't know, I was on a different trip then. But that time was great. I was glad I got to experience it. But being transgendered, there wasn't a lot of girls doing anything. They were still caught up in that "get my hormones, run to the suburbs, forget the life."

SS: Did you know any FTMs back then?

REM: Let's see--yes, back in the late 70s, yes, I knew one named Toby. He was in transition, too. We met at a party. I thought he was really hot. He thought I was really fine. I thought he was a man, he thought I was a woman. We thought, right on! then we found out, and that was it.

SS: Nothing ever came of it?

REM: No. I couldn't do it. I was not that open-minded at that stage of my life. And that's OK--I just wasn't then. He was, but I wasn't.

SS: Toby still around?

REM: I have no idea. Again, I went through a period in life where I basically went back to my straight life, at least the presentation of it. The illusion of just--well, I wasn't out there being political. I thought there was no sense of being a transgender political activist then. Nobody wanted to listen.

SS: Do you think that's changed now?

REM: Oh, yes. Yes. And it's groovy that it's changed.

SS: From the 70s? the 80s?

REM: Yes, from both, and from the 60s, too. They didn't want to hear anything then about female-to-male, male-to-female. They just had ugly interpretations of what that meant. [Sneering] "Maybe for you, but not for us." So I dropped out. I just said I'm not playing. It's like you have to win once in a while, you can't always lose. So I just realized that I wasn't going to win. I was always going to irritate somebody--and somebody was sure as hell going to irritate me. And that was fine. If it was not meant to be, it was not meant to be. Transsexuals can live just fine, crawling through the cracks where nobody else can. They do just fine. Somebody can be drop dead gorgeous--she just goes and puts on 50 pounds and fits right in, slips through the cracks, and does just fine. Not too many other folks can do that. But we are illusionists. We can fool other people. We have better costumes at our disposal. So you want to be a real estate broker? A square secretary? You can do this. You just look a little to the left, and people look and then they don't look. If you're fat, or whatever they say you are not supposed to be to be cool, if you are that, then you can get by. You just do that to find a place. You skirt right through. It works.

SS: You say you went to Stanford for your first appointment when you were 19. How did you hear about the program down there?

REM: When did I hear about Stanford? I think it was from one of my drag queen friends who said she was doing sex-reassignment surgery. So I called, and made an appointment, and filled out forms--lots of forms. And I was going to do it when I was 21, but then I became a real big drunk. I realized that I should not do anything radical--and that was pretty radical--while I was still drinking. Don't do anything while you are drunk. And I didn't. And I'm glad I didn't. If I hadn't been a drunk, I probably would have [had surgery]. There's a point you get to, though, where you just make do. Like I said, when I was in my 30s, I decided that getting it was the wrong thing to do. I had seen too much, done too much, and if you experience too much of life, it changes things. With some people, it changes too much. I was one of those people that it changed too much. I already had some awful experiences with men, and I was not going to be a lesbian, so, like, why bother? If those were not your options, why do it? I'm sorry, but if you ain't gonna get diddled--why? Why do it? I mean, a little cock? What's that? And I thought about my options. I thought about being a transgender lesbian, but--hah [makes a motion of sweeping something away with her hand]. Oh, sure, if somebody perfect walked through the door. A Venus de Milo transsexual with a doctorate in this and a doctorate in that and a hot bod and

money and a good job and all of this--why not? I could be forced into that, if she was a groovy person. It's not who you sleep with, it's about who they are as a person. I could take a gay man, a straight man, a bi man--as long as they were breathing--and he was really groovy and a cool person. I'm going for comfort and security. My sexual preference has nothing to do with that other stuff. Everybody wants to be loved, everybody wants to be desired, and it's just a matter of, is it a good person or a shitty person? And I think that's cool. I would never have come up with that when I was 20, or even 30. It never dawned on me that one day I'd be saying that, that it was about who you were inside, spiritually, that mattered.

SS: Do you have any final shots, any parting comments, you'd like to make?

REM: Yeah. I doesn't matter who or what you are, just be true to yourself. There's a price for everything, and it's just worth it to pay the price. If I knew somebody who was just coming out, I'd say you'd better be strong, because if you are not strong, then just give it up now. If you still have to do it, then get strong. It's a hard hard hard life. No matter who you are, it's a difficult life. But you better enjoy it, because it's the only one you got, at least this time around. Be true to yourself and just be honest with yourself. You're never going to please everybody--you're rarely going to please anybody except yourself. I think that's what I'd say. If you're going to do it, just do it. Kick it.

SS: Well, thanks. That should do it.

[Resume taping, after chatting for a while]

SS: So keep talking.

REM: He would come with his wife--Frank Logan-, Logan-, Logandise, that was it. He was with his wife at that transvestite thing I would go to. He had black hair and a miniskirt and was toothless.

SS: This was around 1975 or so?

REM: Yes, around then. I want to say Salmashis.

SS: Oh--the Salmacis Society. Yeah, I know of that group. They were based down in Menlo Park, in the South Bay. Sally Douglas.

REM: Yes, that's the one. That was very strange. He was one of those that, you know [like to be with women as a woman]. And he was a character. God, I feel sorry for you girl, if you interview him. Be tough. Cross your legs. Keep 'em tight, 'cause he's all that, and you don't even want to go there.

SS: OK. But anyway, you went to Salmacis meetings? Tell me something about that.

REM: Well, we had little neat things that went on. Movies--we saw movies of Dr. Brown's surgeries. They had helpful household hints--helpful trannie household hints, seminars about

beard removal, make-up selection, that sort of thing. They were very supportive. I just wasn't into it, but it was a good place.

SS: I came across a flyer they put out about 1972, that talked about femme-femme relationships. They said they were just into people who were femmes who wanted to be with other femmes, they didn't care what your body was.

REM: They were that way, they were certainly very much that way. And so were the women, the genetic women, who went.

SS: Was it really a feminist organization like their flyer said, or more just another cross-dresser club?

REM: No, ultimately it really was feminist, when you wash it out. But it was a very male organization.

SS: So mostly male transvestites involved with it?

REM: Yeah, and their wives. Which, you know, was really cool. It scared me. I couldn't understand a straight couple, where the woman, which is what I wanted to be, getting turned on by a man who would be wearing my dresses. That was way over the top for me. But I've gotten over it.

SS: So What was this guy's last name again, Frank's?

REM: Logandise, I think.

SS: And this person has transitioned now, is transsexual? Or you don't really know?

REM: Well, pre-operative. I don't think she's ever got her change. Don't think they'd give it to her. But who knows? She might have. I wasn't very fond of her. I thought she was mean and cruel.

SS: I've heard she lost her bars, Francine's and the Black Rose, because of a discrimination suit.

REM: Probably. I wouldn't doubt it. Just a bad attitude.

SS: Actually got sued by customers.

REM: And should have--just an evil, nasty, person. A vampire, a vampire who preyed upon people. But very knowledgeable about--in spite of my own personal opinions about this person, which is irrelevant--was very knowledgeable about the transgender movement, about the history. Was colorful--no, was beyond color.

[End of tape]

Regina Elizabeth McQueen Interview

by Susan Stryker

recorded July 17, 1997

Mad Magda's Coffee House, Hayes Street, San Francisco

Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California
in cooperation with Joanne Meyerowitz, University of Cincinnati

Introduction

Regina Elizabeth McQueen (Gina) is an MTF transgendered person living in the Hayes Valley neighborhood of San Francisco. She was born in 1949 in Pennsylvania, and moved to rural northern California with her family when she was 15, in 1965. She began living full-time as a woman when she left home in 1967 to attend beauty school in Santa Rosa, subsequently making her living by day as a make-up artist at a Merle Norman cosmetics studio, and tending bar by night at the Monkey Pot, a gay establishment. She was accepted for sex-reassignment surgery at the Stanford Gender Dysphoria Program in 1969 when she was 19, but was asked to wait until she turned 21 before having the surgery. Due to struggles with drug and alcohol abuse, McQueen felt herself too dysfunctional to seriously pursue surgery for the next several years, and eventually gave up on the idea when she was 32, in 1982. McQueen had been the first Imperial Court Empress of Santa Rosa in 1971. She frequented San Francisco's countercultural scene throughout the early 1970s, and moved to San Francisco in 1975. She began taking hormones and attending various transgender support groups and social functions there by 1976. After becoming clean and sober in the early 1980s, McQueen embarked on a series of cosmetic plastic surgeries, and has worked on and off in the sex industry.

SS: So, Gina, why don't you start just by telling me your full name.

REM: All right. My name is Regina Elizabeth McQueen.

SS: So do you mind saying when you were born?

REM: December 19, 1949, Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Strict Catholic family. Interesting childhood.

SS: How so?

REM: Well, probably by the time I was five or six years old I was labeled "Susie," or "sissy," and got beat up regularly. All the way through school, my whole entire life, from first grade all the way up through high school, it was very apparent that I was very feminine, very nellie, and got punished for it. It was very rough. Hated school. Hated socializing with people my own age. That didn't work for me. It was rough. It was very ugly. It wasn't pretty. It wasn't natural. I became very militant at an early age. I started fighting back, you know, I didn't really mind being called the names, but I didn't like being hit. And as the years went by it wasn't just being ridiculed, but being hit, beat, raped, house being burglarized, just really being punished for being feminine.

SS: This was when you were a teenager, back in Pennsylvania?

REM: In Pennsylvania and in California.

SS: When did you move out here?

REM: We came to California when I was fifteen.

SS: So was it that your father got a different job, or what?

REM: Yes. We relocated out here, and it didn't change much. I had no support network except my family, growing up.

SS: How were they with you?

REM: Well, they did their best, you know? I mean, the reasons I got beat up and had all these problems was because I was feminine. If I wasn't feminine, and changed my attitude and my way of being, then this probably wouldn't have happened. And they realized that I couldn't change, that that wasn't who I was, and they were supportive, but they were kind of caught between a rock and a hard place. I mean, they weren't supportive because I was feminine, but because I was their child. They hated the fact that I was feminine, but they couldn't fix it, and they knew that neither could anybody else. They didn't punish me for it. I mean, every now and then they would say something because I was acting it out too much or something, but not a whole lot. They knew I was catching my lunch on a daily basis, so what was the sense? They knew that I knew what was going on. But it still continued. There was nothing they could do to stop it. I mean, in those days, like when I was six years old, when kids were like that they got hospitalized, institutionalized. They got psychiatrists, and if they persisted in being too weird or too strange, you know, lobotomies were legal then. I mean, the horror stories I know of people my age that have been transgender male-to-female, their parents threw them on hormones to make them more male, stuff like that. I was very blessed that I didn't, that my parents didn't. But believe me, they could have.

SS: So tell me, when did you start meeting other transgender folks?

REM: Probably when I was 21 [c. 1971], I met my first drag queen. I still hadn't met a transgender person yet.

SS: So that was after you had transitioned yourself?

REM: Oh yeah. I had been out since 1967, full time, living as a woman.

SS: So you were a teenager, and just got fed up with the abuse, and transitioned as a way of dealing with it, or what?

REM: I had always wanted to transition, from the earliest age I can remember I had a resentment that I was born at the wrong time, or in the wrong body. That I didn't like it. That it was ugly. It was cruel. I felt lost. And as the years went by, other things started happening. After

I did my transition I thought it was going to be really cool. I had read some--oh, for lack of a better term, some history books on transgender. People centuries gone by.

SS: Like what, specifically? What did you read that made you feel that perhaps you were not alone?

REM: Oh, I felt totally alone until I was probably, I would say, about 21.

SS: You just started to say that you had been books about people in other time periods. What--?

REM: Yeah, I got books at the library, and I told--talked to a librarian about some of this stuff, because I had been a librarian at my high school, and I said I needed to find out some information on folklore, and on transgender times throughout history. Like in the ancient temples to the goddesses, and all this. So there was a little bit of stuff that I had read--

SS: This is at the public library in Santa Rosa?

REM: Yes. And it wasn't enough, but it gave me the impression that we were great people, that we were sacred people, were important people to the tribes. That we were important to civilization, like a missing link between the sexes. That kind of stuff. So I had this fabulous impression that if people found out what I was, it was going to be cool. You know radical, right on, uh-huh. But this wasn't the case. This was in the days, I guess I was 18, 19, somewhere around in there, and I thought all this was really cool. Well, when I found out that people did not accept this--I lived up north in this cow town, in Santa Rosa. I mean, I had friends that did, but nobody really did. I mean, it was like "Yeah, yeah. You're here. We accept you." Well, no they didn't. It was, behind my back, "You're a freak." All that dishy dirty stuff. It was really dangerous to be a transsexual in those days. It was against the law. Still is, you know? There were blue laws on the books that they enforced. You know you had to have three pieces of male clothing on at all times. You could not get female ID It was impossible for a transgender person to hold down a straight job. But I did. I didn't know there was any other way.

SS: What did you do?

REM: Waitressed.

SS: So did you do this while living at home with your folks, or had you left home?

REM: No, I had left home to go to beauty school. Dad has split. Mom died. I was on my own. Had become a drunk. Drank myself out of two beauty schools, then somehow pulled myself together. Started waiting on tables. Advanced from waiting on tables to working in a strip club as a go-go dancer. Got out of that real quick, because that was an unhealthy environment. I would have gotten killed instantly, and nobody would have done anything about it. Went to work with Merle Norman Cosmetics Studio in Sonoma County.

SS: In Santa Rosa?

REM: Yes, In Santa Rosa. And I went to work in a gay bar. I held down those two jobs--the cosmetics studio and the bar--for, god, maybe five years? One at day and one at night.

SS: What was the gay bar?

REM: It was called the Monkey Pot.

SS: That was also in Santa Rosa?

REM: Yes. And eventually I became an Empress, blah blah blah.

SS: So you were in the Imperial Court System?

REM: Yes, I was the first Empress in Sonoma County. Hated it, though. Had no place. Had no time. Had no political clout. It was a joke, a scam. People thought it was irrelevant, at that time.

SS: Thought the Court System was, or you as Empress?

REM: Thought the Court System was. The whole Court System.

SS: So the Court wasn't that old at that point, was it? 1964, 65, somewhere around in there?

REM: Well, I was like 21 when I became Empress of Sonoma County, so that about 1970, that I was Empress. 70, 71, in there. People weren't taking gays, or any alternative--well, there wasn't any alternative. You were either gay or straight. Bisexual didn't exist, transgender they didn't want to see. So it was rough. And both gay and straight were very firm on this, that there was no such thing as bisexual. And there was no such thing as transsexual. You were a man, or you were woman. You were gay or you were straight. It was very black and white. They didn't like anything else. That caused way too much waves, brought way too much attention. They didn't like nellie, femmy gays. They liked manly gays that were not all that pronounced. I mean, for looks. The political movement was taking off. It was getting real tight. And feminine nellie men were not appreciated, nor were they welcome. Drag queens were not appreciated, not were they welcome. They needed good visual images for the straight world to see. And being transgendered, needless to say, was not one of those images. But needless to say, I was still doing it. I was wrong of course, they would tell me I was wrong for being the way I was, that I needed to be a man, that I needed to be a gay man. Period. This other stuff, you know, you don't need this. It's not natural. It's wrong. And these were gays saying this. I actually had straight friends, on the transgender stuff, who were more supportive than my gay friends.

SS: So you, while all this stuff was going on, you held down a straight job as a woman?

REM: Yeah, and remember, this was the days of big hair and lots of make-up, so it was just really a matter of how good you could put on your make-up. And I was young, and so it worked. I don't quite know how it worked. I mean, people just didn't know about it.

SS: I understand what you're talking about. I mean, my family is all from Oklahoma, and when I go visit--well, here in San Francisco, people always read me as trannie. When I go to Oklahoma, you know, it's just so damn easy.

REM: Yeah. I did this thing in Texas a couple of years ago. I mean, no make-up, no hair, no nothing, looking to the left. And just no problem at all.

SS: So had you heard about any surgical or hormonal possibilities, anything? Did you hear about Harry Benjamin's book when it came out in 1966, or hear anything about Christine Jorgensen?

REM: I heard about Christine, of course. I got hold of stuff, read about it. I thought it was very weird. You know--me, but still weird. Sort of sounds like me, wish it had happened to me. But she wasn't pretty. And she was old. She wasn't young. I was young. It was a role model, sort of. It's like, not who I want to be, not where I want to go, but it was somebody who went somewhere.

SS: Did you know much about what was medically possible, about changing bodies? Did you ever think about pursuing that?

REM: Yeah, early on I did. When I read her book, I wanted to be that.

SS: When did you first learn that surgery was possible?

REM: Whenever it was that her book came out. I remember that it was very scandalous.

SS: That would have been 1967.

REM: Yeah. It hit the newspaper stands, and it was big. And it was scandalous--you know, this is sick, this is wrong. Just sensationalism. People were blown away. It was very controversial. But that's how I heard about it. People talking, normal people. They're just "Oh, this is horrible!" And I'm like "Cool!"

SS: So was this before or after you started reading folklore?

REM: I guess I heard about Christine first. And then later on the folklore stuff. But I was still very confused. I hadn't met anybody yet. Nobody. And that was very weird.

SS: So you read the Jorgensen autobiography, had heard about that, were excited about that, did research on your own--

REM: Yes, did research on my own.

SS: --and was this about the time that you were getting into the gay bar scene?

REM: Well, before. The gay bar scene happened when I was 21, which would be 1970, 71. So this was before, 18 to 1971. And around 1971 and 72, the marches and all the political things, all this was going on, at least up north. The college campuses were abuzz with the ERA amendment

and all of that. That whole time period I was getting involved with--well, after I became an Empress, I didn't know what to do, we didn't have a rule book, and nobody around me knew. I guess in the City they knew what to do, but I wasn't plugged into that network. So I ended going to the college campuses, Sonoma State, the JCs, and giving lectures.

SS: Did you know somebody up there named Mildred Dikeman?

REM: No.

SS: She was an anthropology professor at Sonoma State. She's since started taking testosterone, is sort of transitioning. She had come out as a dyke in the 40s, and has told me how at the time there was no notion of transgender anything that she could find, but that if she had it all to do over again, she'd probably have transitioned earlier--you know, just been a man rather than a butch dyke.

REM: It probably would have been easier to just be a man back then. And transitioning was easier, believe it or not. I mean, it could still be really violent. You could get killed for it. It was ugly. It was just ugly. I mean, if you got stopped by the police, and they asked you produce three pieces of male clothing, and you couldn't do it, you went to jail. And we all know stories about jail. Some girls went and never came back. It was ugly. A horrible time of cruelty and punishment. On the evolutionary scale, anything, any color that was not cool to be, if it was a man, gay or straight, was above what I was. I mean there are ethnic things--whether it be Latino, or Black, or whatever it was that they happened to be beating into the ground then, they were still better than I was, because I was a freak. I had a real hard time. I mean, I didn't have a hard time living it, but I had a hard time dealing with other people's opinions of it. In the gay world.

SS: Was there a lot of segregation between your straight job, that life, and trying to find more of a community?

REM: Oh, I didn't have community.

SS: So what was the gay bar for you? What was it that drew you there?

REM: I was a drunk, a hard-core alcoholic, and I owed a bar tab. And they were having a big party, and needed somebody to cocktail. They hired me to do it to work off my bar tab.

SS: So you just happened to go into that bar the first time because it was just a bar, and you could drink there?

REM: No. Also because it was a gay bar. I was hoping that it would be something of a support network. And in a way it was. But I was still real uncomfortable with it. Because at that time the gays were still so anti anything different that I couldn't find any kind of comfort there. Straight people were actually more comforting. And besides, I wanted to be a woman, blah blah blah. And so it was like, "These people don't understand me because they're gay and I'm really straight. I'm a woman, and I just want to get married and adopt kids and settle down--all that transie dream. I think we're born with it. I think every transsexual has it. And even at that time, I still

hadn't met another transsexual. I had by then met a lot of drag queens who were really cool. They were fun, and they were supportive, but I hadn't met a transsexual.

SS: So you were meeting drag queens when, around 1968, 69, just after transitioning?

REM: Yeah, just after transitioning, so around then. And every now and then I'd make a trip to the city. Take in all the glitter and the glamour of San Francisco.

SS: Where were some of the places where you would go?

REM: Well, Polk Street was really really really happening then. There were places all down Polk.

SS: Remember any names of places?

REM: Oh yeah, sure. I remember the first club I ever went into in San Francisco that I thought was really happening was a place called—damn, I can't remember it! It was on Broadway, downstairs, underground, a kind of after hours club. And they had everything going on there. I mean, it was a very colorful scene. Very bohemian. Gay people. Straight people. Show girls. Show boys.

SS: This was in North Beach?

REM: Yeah—well anyway, that was the first place I ever went. And obviously this is before there's a Castro.

SS: Yeah, this is what I want to hear from you, where was Gay San Francisco then? Where did you go?

REM: Well, I didn't go anywhere South of Market. That was all leathery and rough and weird and uncivilized. This city was very split then.

SS: How so? What do you mean?

REM: Lesbians had their places. Drag queens had their places. Drag queens and transgenders were not allowed in certain bars. Period. It was a man's bar. You had to be a man, and look like a man, to be there. And a woman's bar—same deal. But the places that I went to were like Busby's, Gold Street, places like that.

SS: Busby's—where was that?

REM: It was on Polk Street. I went there. After I moved here, that's where I spent a lot of time, at Busby's. That was in 1975, around that time there. So it was colorful. Really cool—god, it was cool. So it was about 1975 and before that I would come on these little excursions, come to the big city to be wild and wicked and to live. You could walk down Polk Street and the whole street would be full of prostitutes. One side would be men standing out there posing, luscious little creatures—oh! And on the other side of the street would be women dressed in evening gowns

with feather boas and big hair and lots of make-up. And the next night, some of the boys would be over there on the other side of the street, in femme drag, and vice versa. It was colorful. It was fun. It was parties, house parties, all the time. Sausalito was happening. San Rafael was happening.

SS: Let me ask you about the house parties. House parties were especially big for African American queers because of discrimination in the bars and--

REM: Yes, that was certainly very true.

SS: --and I was just wondering if that was the same for trannies, like because they couldn't go into a lot of bars.

REM: Well, no, because there really was no such thing as a trans community. There was none. At all. None. The gays had SIR. I was a part of that--well, not really a part of that, but participated. I was a member. The Society of Individual Rights. I didn't find out about doctors, about using doctors to get work done, or for hormones or anything like that, for --gosh, maybe around 1976. I guess after I had been here in San Francisco for about a year. I went to the Center for Special Problems and got on a hormone called DES--diethylstilbesterol, which then became an illegal hormone. Never once was I tested. Never once did I have blood drawn. They never did any sorts of follow-up with any of the people that took that hormone. You just got what you got. They had sliding scale. They had therapy. There was some other groups that were happening--oh, just down the street from here, something, a transgender group that, now what was it . . .

SS: Well, there was one transgender group that had started back in 1967 at Glide, this thing called Conversion Our Goal.

REM: No, that wasn't it.

SS: Then there was the National Transsexual Counseling Unit, that was run out of the Anti-Poverty Office. Eventually that was down on Third Street, by the old Mattachine.

REM: No, this was just down the street here.

SS: There was something over on Turk, the Helping Hand Center.

REM: Hm, no, this was around Polk and Van Ness. It had a funny name. They had an office. I belonged to it for a while.

SS: Was it Janus? The Janus Information Facility? That was around in the mid 70s.

REM: Might have been. Something like that. And then there was a couple of transvestite groups that also had transsexuals in it.

SS: Remember any of those?

REM: God, no, even though I belonged to one.

SS: There was Golden Gate Girls and Golden Gate Guys. ETVC didn't come along until a little later, around 1980.

REM: Yeah, that was later. This one was before that. God.

SS: There was the COITS, but that was a little different, more of a drag debutante ball sort of thing.

REM: No, this was transvestites.

SS: Hets rather than drag queens?

REM: [Nodding yes.] Came with their wives and girlfriends.

SS: Tri-Ess--The Society for the Second Self?

REM: Gosh, I just don't remember. It's been so long now. I did that, but didn't like it at all. Not at all. Thought it was just too weird. Because I got hit on, see? I mean, I didn't mind everybody looking pretty, but those girls liked other girls. And that warped me. I didn't know about that. That was just too weird. I couldn't even understand that. I mean--I had problems with guys liking me. I thought it was wrong. I believed that for many, many, many, many years. After I made the transition, anybody who wanted me was sick in the head. And even if anything ever came of it, it was just wrong. It would have been OK if I had got my surgery, but it was like, preoperative, anybody who wanted you was really gay. And they just didn't know it, but if you didn't know it, then you were sicker than they were. And so, I had a lot of issues, issues that were handed down to me from the gay world, and the straight world, and from everybody that had an opinion. Because god knows, if you don't know anything about anything--and you really don't know anything about anything--then whatever you hear, you kind of take that as a fact. It's like "Oh, OK. Well, that doesn't seem very fair, but I guess it's right." You know, it's wrong, but it's right. They're right and I'm wrong. Guess I'll just die and go straight to hell for it. And probably would have at that time. So I couldn't find any place to get any real good support. So that's why I went to Center for Special Problems, and that's where I first started meeting other transsexuals. I would say around 1975, 76 is when I was going there. I liked it there, it was cool. Little chat groups, girls just talking about their stuff. God, I was a star, because I had held down a straight job for years. You know, this was like a major feat in their eyes. I'd never really thought about it. You know it's like--what else do you do? Sunday night you're a boy, Monday you want to be a girl. How do you live? Well, you get a job. You know? You just get a job. So I got a job. I went out and got a job. I put on my make-up, did my wig, got into some cute clothes, and just hit it. Walked out and applied for some jobs. Got one. Didn't know that there was any kind of obstacles to overcome. When I was young, I had no idea. Now I look back and think I was rather insane. Well, naive. Rose-colored glasses, all that junk. But I did it. I was ballsy and just did it. I did it naively. I mean--coming to the city and becoming a prostitute, I'd never even heard of that. So it was like, there was no other option. Just get a job.

[break in taping]

REM: OK, so where were we?

SS: You were just telling me about getting a job, and about being at the Center for Special Problems, and not realizing that there were obstacles a lot of transgendered people faced in finding employment.

REM: Right. I didn't, I really didn't understand, that we just weren't supposed to be able to do all that stuff. I didn't know any better. So, it's like if you don't know any different, then you just think that's natural. And I would still tell anybody, anybody in any walk of life and any way, shape, or form, that if you really really really want a job, then you can just go and get a job. Or you get a check. You get whatever it takes to get yourself from A to Z. You want to support yourself, then you got to get a job.

SS: So, you had this job in Santa Rosa, this was the town that you moved to when you were fifteen? So people knew you there?

REM: No, actually, I lived in Ukiah when I was fifteen. But I wanted to go to beauty school, so I moved to Sonoma County, which had the closest beauty school. I just did it. And after beauty school, I just totally dropped out. Everyone in beauty school totally thought I was a girl. White hair, long gold nails. I pushed the envelope, as they say now. I did more than push it.

SS: So part of transitioning, when you started that, was getting out of your family, getting yourself to a different town?

REM: Well, my family was all gone by this time.

SS: Your Dad was gone, your Mother had died, you said.

REM: Yeah. I was all alone.

SS: No siblings?

REM: They were all back East. So they were all gone, and I had a clean slate to start over with. And I just did it. And I did it well. It really worked for me. I did fashion shows, those sorts of things, for Magnin's. They never knew. I was a customer, you see, and back then, once a year, they'd throw these little parties for their best customers, the pretty ones, the ones with the best bodies, or the highest-paying customers, they'd be invited to do these little shows. You'd walk out in these expensive designer dresses, do your twirl, and then you're done. It was kind of a campy thing, but it cut down overhead and built up business. And it was just this nice normal thing that women did. And I got invited to do it because I was a good customer. I liked it, liked being on stage. I like drag shows. I became a stripper.

SS: When did you first start doing drag shows?

REM: In the gay bar, there in Santa Rosa. It was kind of mandatory. You know--you're a queen, this is what queens do.

SS: So in the straight world you were a woman, but in the gay world you were a queen.

REM: Exactly. I was a freak.

SS: So you weren't passing to the extent that--well, there wasn't any place you could go as a woman and feel accepted?

REM: There was just the one gay bar, and if you went there, and you were a woman, then you were either a drag queen or a fag hag. There was nothing else.

SS: So I'm just wondering why you kept going to the bar. I know you said it was because you were an alcoholic and were drinking, but--

REM: And after awhile it became a job.

SS: Yeah, but did it become a way of trying to figure out something about yourself, who you were?

REM: No--I was totally confused. At that time I worked there every night, I hustled my way into working there every night, well, almost every night. And when I wasn't there, I was out trying to live a life. I was in straight bars, picking up straight men. I could do it. Some I would lie to, some I would tell the truth to. And you know, more times than not, it was received very well. Maybe it was received for no more than about an hour, but it was still received. But I say "a straight lifestyle" and I don't even really know what one is. My conception of what one was then, and what I now think one really is, are very different.

SS: Like how?

REM: Well, then it was real redneck. If you were straight you were straight you were straight. You went to church, blah blah blah. You didn't hang around with anybody colorful or avant-garde. None of that. You were just square. You bought the rule book, you read it, you memorized it, you lived it. Nothing weird, nothing out of line, just boring. Then, the minute you start crossing over the line, into any sort of alternative lifestyles, you were bohemian. That's what a straight person became. Later on I went into a very straight life style and ignored it all, ignored everything. My first boyfriend that I had as an adult didn't want to have anything to do with that, so we lived a very straight lifestyle--except that it was consumed with alcohol and drugs. I don't know. I didn't have a lot of support systems with all that stuff. It's like, by that stage of the game it didn't matter what anybody thought, what the rules of the game were. It just didn't matter anymore. It was all about what I wanted, and fuck the world. When I realized that I could get killed for what I was--and I realized that as a child, but when that really clicked in--I started to live life very recklessly. Whatever I wanted to do I just did it, and whatever price was to pay I just paid it. I became very bitter and resentful. I was a daily alcoholic and a daily drug addict. I was full of hatred and bitterness and rage and resentment and more resentment. And confusion--because, you know, you gotta be right once in a while about something, you know? I mean, you got to be right once in a while. You can't always be wrong all the time. And everything about me, somebody saw it as wrong. I was just wrong. And I just decided I wasn't gonna buy that anymore. I just wasn't gonna care anymore. By that time I had beaten a lot, raped a lot. Life

seemed really short then, because at any moment I felt I could be killed for wearing a dress. So if I felt like being in Sausalito one day, then like it or don't like it, it doesn't matter, that's where I'm going to be. And then I got it--you know, finally, a miracle, a light bulb, all that good stuff. You gotta be who you gotta be, do what you gotta do. Because life is short. And now that you've got that understood--live. You were born to live, and then you die. So live while you are living. It clicked. Things got better.

SS: When did that happen for you?

REM: Late. Way late. Way, way, way, way late. Almost too late. I would say that when it really clicked in I was in my late 20s, and I took it on as a lifestyle, a religion, whatever, after I got sober when I was 32. I just said, "Oh, Mary, the church don't like me, the government don't like me, society don't like me, fags don't like me, my own kind don't like me--Oh well. I like me. Kick ass." And I did. I kicked ass. I rode with bikers. I was a stripper. Whatever whim--I did it. Auntie Mame lived. She just got unglued inside me. Everybody has got an Auntie Mame character inside them, and mine just popped out, kind of a cross between Auntie Mame and Anna Madrigal, and just said, "Dust. Eat my shorts. Blow me. If you don't like me, you can just fuckin' blow me." And that was kind of my philosophy. I didn't pick on anybody else's stuff, but the minute anybody started picking on mine it was time to box. Because of my alcoholism before I was 32, which was really intense, I had developed attitude. And I was real redneck. In my book it was OK for me to be who I was, and what was not OK was for anyone to judge it. And when they did, I'd fight. This sissy would fight. She got butch and she would kick ass. And the more ass I kicked, the more I realized that there wasn't that much ass to kick--you know? It's like, well there's always one, so just get rid of it at the beginning. Seek and destroy. Move on. Start living. All those bullies stopped being bullies when they realized that I was just not going to go away. And when society really realizes that society is not going away, when it realizes that there are more minorities than there are quote "normal folks," just more avant-garde colorful people in the world than there are normal folk, then they are going to get really scared. When they realize that there are more different colors on the planet than there are white people, they're going to freak. When you add the Latin, the Black, the Asians, the mixes, and get them all going on--there's way more of them than the white folk. As a collective. There are more women and children on the planet than men. There's more of everything than that quote "white capitalist straight male." That's the tiniest minority in the world, that little group. Especially here--there's more of everything here than them.

[break in taping]

SS: So, you started at the CSP in 1975, 76 or so. Did you ever think about doing surgery?

REM: Yeah, I was going to do surgery. The years had been going by, and I wanted surgery, wanted surgery, wanted surgery, wanted surgery. And then when I got sober, and looked again at the question of surgery, I realized that that was just another way to keep me down. It's like "Honey, don't pretend to be something that you are not." It was like, for me to be normal and right--or normaler and righter--I had to go and get surgery to alter down there to fit in. And I looked at that, and said "You are too goddamn old to worry about fitting in anymore. You are 32 years old. You are too old." It was like "You've got it and never used it, not really. Maybe you should experience this." And I was honest about it to myself. I experimented. And finally I just

said screw it--I am who I am and I like it that way. And the idea of having reassignment, I just blew that out of the water. I realized it was the same game that gay people were playing on my head when I was younger, and straight people, telling me that I had to have a place to fit in. Well, no I don't. I'm alive and I'm on the planet, and that makes me fit in. I don't have to fit a stereotype, I don't have to fit a mold. I don't have to get it cut off to get a pussy to fit into straight society which I'm never going to fit anyway. Because any man that you'd find, you'd have to tell them. Because if you don't somebody's gonna. So--all that stuff.

SS: Do you take hormones?

REM: Oh, yeah. I've been on hormones for years.

SS: When did that start?

REM: When I was at Center for Special Problems. I went on DES.

SS: Right, you mentioned that.

REM: And other stuff, too. I took Estinyl, Provera, Premarin, all that. I've been on hormones for years. Mostly, most all of the time, since then. But since age 32 I've had my whole body redone-- I've had my face done, my nose done, my breasts done, my hips done, my legs done, my ass done.

SS: So you've had a lot of plastic surgery, but just not genital surgery.

REM: Right. Just not genital surgery. It's just not necessary. It's not necessary to fit into society. But you have to be able to stand in front of the mirror and love who you are, inside and outside. I did mine purely for cosmetic reasons. I was older, and I just wanted to look--

[end of tape]

SS: So we were talking about body alteration.

REM: Yes. I was reinventing myself. I had decided that I wasn't going to be a woman, so I might as well be a sex goddess. I was going to be pretty. I was going to give it the best shot I could give it. And I did it. And it was fun. At the same time, I decided that if I wasn't going to be a woman and be a sex goddess instead, that I was also going to be a sex worker. I was just going to try it out. I didn't want to be in a relationship, didn't want a boyfriend, didn't want a girlfriend, didn't want to be married. I thought, "It's better to be a whore than a slut." But there I was, a 32 year-old ex-housewife, just got out of a sick relationship, kicked heroin and speed and alcohol and a husband. Thought: hate men, love cock. Broke. Young men paying a hundred dollars a throw. Ha! Sounds good to me. Did it. Enjoyed it. Did it for a couple of years. Quit for a couple of years. Got a job. Went back to doing it again. Quit again. You know how it is--back and forth, back and forth. But I love it. In a heartbeat, somebody young, 22, gorgeous butt, sexy, wants me, gotta have me--yes he can have me, for the right price. It makes it worth it, when I'm pushing 50. Ego building and boosting. At 22 it might be degrading. Might be very degrading at 22. But pushing 50, it's groovy, and I'm just sorry if you don't think so.

SS: Was it hard for you to get the surgeries that you wanted? Did you have any trouble working with the surgeon, or finding one?

REM: No, I did a lot of research, a lot of research. I've not had one problem with anything I've had done. I've had one doctor, very reputable, went, checked out all his stuff, you know, I guess I just did a lot of research, and found this one doctor, he's done all my work.

SS: So did you do that here locally, or did you have to go elsewhere?

REM: No, over in San Leandro. I started doing that--oh, like I said, when I was 32, like 15 years ago I started having my first silicone injections in my face, because half my face had been caved in. I started going for it. It was just one of those things, where you say "You know, you could drop dead tomorrow." Try to become at least the illusion of what you want instead of a bitter old shell because you can't. I did, and I liked it. I became even more comfortable as the years have gone by. After I got sober--I had a rough year, that first year, but after that I kind of came to grips with it all. I just said, "This is the hand I was dealt, this is what I have in fact chose to be dealt. This is what I like. This is who I am." And did it. Just did it. You know, this is your only life, so have whatever hair color you gotta have. If you want both, go get it. If you want one of each, if that's what's really gonna make you a better person, a better citizen, what ever, just whatever makes you you, just do it. Make that change.

SS: Did you have to get any psych referrals to do the surgery that you wanted, or was the surgeon willing to work with you?

REM: He was just willing to work with me. I'd already been transgendered so long that there was no reason why not to. So I didn't have any problem with that. But we talked immensely about size--the size of this, the size of that. I didn't want anything huge. I've got a 35 and a half rib cage, and a B-C cup, which brings me up to 40 inches, 38 inches nipple to nipple, 28 inch waist, and 40 inch hips. 140 pounds. It's cute. I mean, it's more than cute. It's good, it's very good. No fat, no flab. Walk a lot, exercise a little. I feel good most of the time, and eat whatever I want. I like it just the way it is. It would have been easy for me to come out, if I was young, at this time. Because there's more knowledge, more information. When I was 19 I went to Stanford for my first interview, to get reassignment surgery, and I passed, to get it, but they wanted me to wait until I was 21. And I kept on thinking about it--this is what I want to do, this is what I want to do--but then I never did it. And I began to think that maybe there was a very good reason why I didn't do it. You know? I wouldn't want to be just a woman. They don't have it so good at all. Babies. Husbands that beat 'em. Other women trying to get their husbands away from them. I mean, a woman's life is not glamorous. It's not exciting, a normal woman's life. And there is nothing normal about me, so why should I go for that, when it's not really me? I just like it where it's at. This is comfortable for me.

SS: So you decided that getting genital surgery would be opting for a more normal life?

REM: It would be a betrayal. Buying into a system that doesn't work for anybody. The idea that any person has to have any kind of surgery to fit into a society--huh-uh. That's not right. Now, if you want surgery, for you to fit into your skin, that's another story. That's an elective thing. That's

something that you want to do for you. But to fit in? No, I don't think that's right. For you to fit into you, that's a groovy thing.

SS: I was just asking, because it's obvious that you're making a distinction between some kinds of surgery and others, and was wondering what your thinking was on that.

REM: When I decided to do all of this other stuff, this surgery, it was strictly for money. I knew men liked it more. It was a money-maker. Tits are always a money-maker, you know? That's what men like. And I've got them because of that.

SS: But do you like having them?

REM: Oh, I love them. They're beautiful. But you know, I don't trip on them. I don't trip on any of it.

SS: Same with the face stuff, the rest of it?

REM: Yeah. I don't trip on it. When the make-up is on, it's on, and I don't stand in front of the mirror. I don't. It's actually difficult for me, because half of my face used to be caved in, and I still see that. So it's that I don't like what I see, although I know that what I see is not what I'm looking at, you know? There's a difference. It's like if you've always been fat and you suddenly get skinny, you still see yourself as fat. When you see a big old ugliness about your face, like the whole side of your face is caved in, well, you look at that and go "Eegh!" And even though you've had that fixed, there are those days when the picture you get back is something you don't want to see. But that's not what you see when you put on your make-up. It's like, if you have facial hair, and you're painting your face, you see that. I couldn't deal with that--had it all ripped out, waxed my face every day for ten years.

SS: Didn't do electrolysis?

REM: Tried it once, scarred. So I waxed every day, just ripped it right out. Ten years straight. I don't have hardly any hair left on my face, maybe 30, 40 hairs, and I tweeze those. I wax when I have to go do something really special. But that's what I was all about, glamour and beauty. That possibility. That's what my life was all about. Now it's not, it's really not. Now I don't care. Most of the time I run around without any make-up, looking to the left, walking my dog--I just don't care. Somebody says "You a man or a woman?" I say "I'm a man. Now leave me alone." I don't want to play, you know? "I'm a man. Does that work for you? Oh, it doesn't? Well then what does work? What will work to make you go away? Because I'll be that. Woman? Hermorphodite? Whatever it takes." You know that old line: is it real, or is it Memorex? It's Memorex, %100 simulation of who know what--but it's cool. It's still marketable. And I like that. I have a blast. But it took a lot to get there. It took a lot of deprogramming. And I think what it would be like to live in a society where everything was cool and groovy, like we like to think it could be, and I don't know if I would have ever done any of this stuff. If it was OK for me to be what I was at six, I don't know if I'd be here having this conversation today, looking the way I do now. But it wasn't OK, and this is the product of it. If it was OK to be gay or androgynous or whatever growing up, if kids could see that, then they might not end up like this. They might say cool, it's groovy just the way I am. Bingo. Deal. I'm masculine, feminine, none of the above, all of the

above, whatever. But it wasn't cool back then. None of it was. Nothing was cool. Now it's just more cool to be yourself. I love being me. I don't have to fit. I fit just by my being. I don't do a lot of stuff that's considered political. I just don't get involved in that stuff. Now it's all about art, and looking at the battles I want to fight. You know, life is war--right, got it, now which battles do you want to fight in life? There are those days when somebody taps you on the shoulder and says "Hey buddy!" Well, that may be a good day to fight, but then you think, is this a good battle for the here and now? No, probably not. but then you go into the hospital, where you are paying thousands of dollars for being taken care of, or you have Medi-Cal, or whatever, and some tacky nurse says "excuse me, sir..." after you just had \$60,000 worth of surgery, well, then you just might have a right to have a battle. And you deserve it. It's not about how well you fight. It's about winning. If they are bigger and badder and stronger, you are going to lose. But if they are not, and they've done something to degrade you, then you have a right to fight. But do it right. Giving her a swift knock would feel good, but there are channels. Lawyers. TV, Newspapers, Where ever you feel like taking it. That's what I mean about picking your battles. You know, if there was a firing squad outside tomorrow, and all transgendered people had to get in this line, all going to get bumped, I'd be one of the first ones in line. Just because that's where I belong. I'm not going to hide, go under a bush, try to go over to the other side, pass. I don't care about passing anymore. I don't. It's not worth it. The deception of trying to fit in, to pass is wrong. It's wrong, it's wrong. It causes people heartaches, trying to pass. You know, the pretty girl who passes, everybody says oh, she's got it made. Not really. Then you've got the ugly country bumpkin who \$100,000 worth of surgery is not going to make her pass, sure everybody at first is all over her--rerr, rerr, rerr--but then it's "Oh, why pick on her?" She's got it made. Everybody knows what she's about, and they let her alone. But the pretty one, when they find out she's been passing, she's the one who loses her home, her job, her family, her cars, that other stuff. So I say sure, be beautiful, that has it's perks. But more important, be real. And by that, I mean be real to yourself.

SS: Even if it's Memorex.

REM: Even if it's Memorex. Just own it. I was not pretty. And that's OK. I'm a surgery queen. It's something to do. It's fun. I like it. It works for me. I like the idea of having so much done that I don't have to wear make-up any more. I hate thick foundations. I had the beard yanked out because I hate thick foundations. Now when I do something special, a show for friends, whatever, then out comes the tackle box and on it goes. I wear everything in it, and love it. It's fun. Drag is fun. Any kind of drag is fun. Dressing like a harem dancer and coming to Magda's on Monday night and serving tea is fun. It's drag. Dressing as a lady construction worker and coming to Magda's on Wednesday night and serving tea is fun. Corporate drag is fun. Whatever it takes to get you through it, and have a good time doing it. I don't like the limiting factors that people put on themselves. I hated the fact that I put a lot of limitations on myself growing up. But I don't any more. Now I pick and chose my battles.

SS: Well, that certainly sounds like a great way to live a life. Um, if you don't mind indulging my history geekiness here for just a minute, could you tell me more about, I'd like to hear more about that period when you were first transitioning, up to say 1975 or so. What the connections were between Santa Rosa and San Francisco--and the Court System.

REM: The Court System is tired and boring.

SS: Well, what I'm asking is whether you saw it as tired and boring in 1971.

REM: Yes, it was then, and it still is now. But, on the other hand, I say that because it's not my thing. And the first few times I came to the city, for the big balls--oh my god, girl, it was unbelievable.

SS: What was it like? And which balls did you go to?

REM: All of them. The Empress Balls, the Black and White Balls, the Court System Balls, everything--the dresses, the costumes, the sets, the music. It was like "Whoa!" It was like what you thought Hollywood could be. There was one I went to in this Marie Antoinette period thing, with hoop skirts and powdered wig, all that, and--oh my god, it was just incredible. The ambiance, the magnetism, the energy. The glitter, the glamour. They were all that way. And there was gays so I didn't like it all the time. Sometimes I hated going. But I always knew that by the end of the evening I would have had a wonderful time. It was really incredible. The movement, the political stuff, too. We lived with the fear that somebody could just come in to one of those balls with a gun, or one bomb, and boom! it would all be over. It would be gone, fairy dust everywhere. Didn't stop anybody. Didn't stop me, certainly. I was for it. I was really for it. I figured if straight people, bi people, gay people really got their shit together and acknowledged that they were each cool, happening choices, then they could all look at me and say, "Well, of course you're cool girl. If we've got a place, you've got a place." Well, they didn't, and I did anyway--in spite of their turmoil. You know, I always tease myself with this one, would I like to be young again, today? Not really. It wouldn't be any fun. The life I wanted then I could have now, but it wouldn't be any fun. Living through that experience made me a better person. It ain't ever going to be that way again for anybody. It was the period. Like in the 20s, gay or straight, everybody had to deal with Prohibition. they were being decadent for that time period. We were being decadent for our time period. Well, we were decadent for everybody's time period. But the parties--the parties were like they are now. They were very mixed. You were either in or you were out. And if you were in, it didn't matter what you were, gay, straight, bi, or trans. You were hip. It was kind of a collage--gay bohemian. And now it's broadened out even more. I wish I could tell you more. It wasn't a great big mass of sex orgies. People think that's what those parties were back then, and that's what some of them were. But that's not what was going on. Not a couple of hundred people doing it. Sure, a couple of people in the cloak room, or in a locked bedroom, there was always that. And always a couple of people shooting up, but not everybody. That was not what it was about. It was actually kind of wholesome. It was very nurturing, that you just fit, because you belonged. Like, "Oh, you're Black, so what? You're trans, so what? You're pinko, so what?" If you were an asshole you were out, and if you weren't you were in. If you could hang with everybody else's shit you were in, and if you couldn't you were out. You were groovy or you weren't. Those were the kinds of people I chose to hang out with. That's what the movement was like here.

SS: But you also talked earlier about being a redneck up in Santa Rosa, and how straight even the gay culture was. So when did the counterculture really hit for you? The hippie scene--is that ever what you were involved with?

REM: Yes. Hello. It was. I had really long hair, and it was fun to paint something on it, half a butterfly or whatever, throw some glitter on, some wild bodacious mod clothes, go out and smoke dope in the Haight. It wasn't about your crotch or your color. You were cool or not cool. It was very political. And musicians. Older people and younger people--and even younger people. Real young people. It was really cool. Stuff you see on TV now, when they do these flashbacks to the 60s and 70s? Huh-uh. Tales of the City? Excellent, but not quite--it was all that and more. More. It was much more intense for everybody. And really fucking groovy. You'd just come to the city, and you'd know people. "Oh--tonight's the opening of Jesus Christ Superstar, do you want to go?" "Well, I just got to town, and I didn't really bring any money, and I don't have anything to wear, and I'm having a poor period right now." Or ""Sure, I've got some money, but I don't have anything to wear." Well, in a few minutes you'd be dressed, and you'd be going--and you'd go in a group. People cared. They really cared. This city was wonderful. It was really kickin'. And Berkeley was kickin' it, too, even though they were a little [lifts nose in air]. They were always that way, always a little [lifts nose in air]. But on the flip side of that, they could look down their noses at a whole lot of people, because they were like "We're here. We're the intelligent. We're the educated set, and we're the political set, and we're the rebel rousers, and--." Hell yeah, they were out. Very out and very political there. And it was radical. Guys would be walking down the street holding hands. Women would be going down the street holding hands. And you'd think no, that can't be, but it was.

SS: Did you run around at all with the Cockettes?

REM: No, I know some of the Cockettes now, but I didn't really run around with them then. Michelle was in the Cockettes. Bambi Lake, later. She had come in, was around the same arena of people. Yeah, I knew those people, but when all that was going on, I was coming out of my political phase more, and wanting to be more mainstream. Didn't want the life at that time, wanted to be more normal, more calm. And I couldn't, because I was still drinking, still doing the drugs. But I still wanted that more calmer life, holding down a straight job, whatever it was. Boyfriend, blah, blah, blah. I just didn't want all that other stuff. Been there, done that. I was through with that. And basically I was. I started calming down more. I started realizing that there were a lot of good things to get out of life, and one of them was peace of mind. And another was a good healthy lifestyle for me to grow up in. I needed to grow up one more time. You know, I'm at that place again--what are you gonna do when you grow up? I don't know. Something else. Which is cool. I don't know, I was on a different trip then. But that time was great. I was glad I got to experience it. But being transgendered, there wasn't a lot of girls doing anything. They were still caught up in that "get my hormones, run to the suburbs, forget the life."

SS: Did you know any FTMs back then?

REM: Let's see--yes, back in the late 70s, yes, I knew one named Toby. He was in transition, too. We met at a party. I thought he was really hot. He thought I was really fine. I thought he was a man, he thought I was a woman. We thought, right on! then we found out, and that was it.

SS: Nothing ever came of it?

REM: No. I couldn't do it. I was not that open-minded at that stage of my life. And that's OK--I just wasn't then. He was, but I wasn't.

SS: Toby still around?

REM: I have no idea. Again, I went through a period in life where I basically went back to my straight life, at least the presentation of it. The illusion of just--well, I wasn't out there being political. I thought there was no sense of being a transgender political activist then. Nobody wanted to listen.

SS: Do you think that's changed now?

REM: Oh, yes. Yes. And it's groovy that it's changed.

SS: From the 70s? the 80s?

REM: Yes, from both, and from the 60s, too. They didn't want to hear anything then about female-to-male, male-to-female. They just had ugly interpretations of what that meant. [Sneering] "Maybe for you, but not for us." So I dropped out. I just said I'm not playing. It's like you have to win once in a while, you can't always lose. So I just realized that I wasn't going to win. I was always going to irritate somebody--and somebody was sure as hell going to irritate me. And that was fine. If it was not meant to be, it was not meant to be. Transsexuals can live just fine, crawling through the cracks where nobody else can. They do just fine. Somebody can be drop dead gorgeous--she just goes and puts on 50 pounds and fits right in, slips through the cracks, and does just fine. Not too many other folks can do that. But we are illusionists. We can fool other people. We have better costumes at our disposal. So you want to be a real estate broker? A square secretary? You can do this. You just look a little to the left, and people look and then they don't look. If you're fat, or whatever they say you are not supposed to be to be cool, if you are that, then you can get by. You just do that to find a place. You skirt right through. It works.

SS: You say you went to Stanford for your first appointment when you were 19. How did you hear about the program down there?

REM: When did I hear about Stanford? I think it was from one of my drag queen friends who said she was doing sex-reassignment surgery. So I called, and made an appointment, and filled out forms--lots of forms. And I was going to do it when I was 21, but then I became a real big drunk. I realized that I should not do anything radical--and that was pretty radical--while I was still drinking. Don't do anything while you are drunk. And I didn't. And I'm glad I didn't. If I hadn't been a drunk, I probably would have [had surgery]. There's a point you get to, though, where you just make do. Like I said, when I was in my 30s, I decided that getting it was the wrong thing to do. I had seen too much, done too much, and if you experience too much of life, it changes things. With some people, it changes too much. I was one of those people that it changed too much. I already had some awful experiences with men, and I was not going to be a lesbian, so, like, why bother? If those were not your options, why do it? I'm sorry, but if you ain't gonna get diddled--why? Why do it? I mean, a little cock? What's that? And I thought about my options. I thought about being a transgender lesbian, but--hah [makes a motion of sweeping something away with her hand]. Oh, sure, if somebody perfect walked through the door. A Venus de Milo transsexual with a doctorate in this and a doctorate in that and a hot bod and

money and a good job and all of this—why not? I could be forced into that, if she was a groovy person. It's not who you sleep with, it's about who they are as a person. I could take a gay man, a straight man, a bi man—as long as they were breathing—and he was really groovy and a cool person. I'm going for comfort and security. My sexual preference has nothing to do with that other stuff. Everybody wants to be loved, everybody wants to be desired, and it's just a matter of, is it a good person or a shitty person? And I think that's cool. I would never have come up with that when I was 20, or even 30. It never dawned on me that one day I'd be saying that, that it was about who you were inside, spiritually, that mattered.

SS: Do you have any final shots, any parting comments, you'd like to make?

REM: Yeah. I doesn't matter who or what you are, just be true to yourself. There's a price for everything, and it's just worth it to pay the price. If I knew somebody who was just coming out, I'd say you'd better be strong, because if you are not strong, then just give it up now. If you still have to do it, then get strong. It's a hard hard hard life. No matter who you are, it's a difficult life. But you better enjoy it, because it's the only one you got, at least this time around. Be true to yourself and just be honest with yourself. You're never going to please everybody--you're rarely going to please anybody except yourself. I think that's what I'd say. If you're going to do it, just do it. Kick it.

SS: Well, thanks. That should do it.

[Resume taping, after chatting for a while]

SS: So keep talking.

REM: He would come with his wife--Frank Logan-, Logan-, Logandise, that was it. He was with his wife at that transvestite thing I would go to. He had black hair and a miniskirt and was toothless.

SS: This was around 1975 or so?

REM: Yes, around then. I want to say Salmashis.

SS: Oh--the Salmacis Society. Yeah, I know of that group. They were based down in Menlo Park, in the South Bay. Sally Douglas.

REM: Yes, that's the one. That was very strange. He was one of those that, you know [like to be with women as a woman]. And he was a character. God, I feel sorry for you girl, if you interview him. Be tough. Cross your legs. Keep 'em tight, 'cause he's all that, and you don't even want to go there.

SS: OK. But anyway, you went to Salmacis meetings? Tell me something about that.

REM: Well, we had little neat things that went on. Movies--we saw movies of Dr. Brown's surgeries. They had helpful household hints--helpful trannie household hints, seminars about

beard removal, make-up selection, that sort of thing. They were very supportive. I just wasn't into it, but it was a good place.

SS: I came across a flyer they put out about 1972, that talked about femme-femme relationships. They said they were just into people who were femmes who wanted to be with other femmes, they didn't care what your body was.

REM: They were that way, they were certainly very much that way. And so were the women, the genetic women, who went.

SS: Was it really a feminist organization like their flyer said, or more just another cross-dresser club?

REM: No, ultimately it really was feminist, when you wash it out. But it was a very male organization.

SS: So mostly male transvestites involved with it?

REM: Yeah, and their wives. Which, you know, was really cool. It scared me. I couldn't understand a straight couple, where the woman, which is what I wanted to be, getting turned on by a man who would be wearing my dresses. That was way over the top for me. But I've gotten over it.

SS: So What was this guy's last name again, Frank's?

REM: Logandise, I think.

SS: And this person has transitioned now, is transsexual? Or you don't really know?

REM: Well, pre-operative. I don't think she's ever got her change. Don't think they'd give it to her. But who knows? She might have. I wasn't very fond of her. I thought she was mean and cruel.

SS: I've heard she lost her bars, Francine's and the Black Rose, because of a discrimination suit.

REM: Probably. I wouldn't doubt it. Just a bad attitude.

SS: Actually got sued by customers.

REM: And should have--just an evil, nasty, person. A vampire, a vampire who preyed upon people. But very knowledgeable about--in spite of my own personal opinions about this person, which is irrelevant--was very knowledgeable about the transgender movement, about the history. Was colorful--no, was beyond color.

[End of tape]