

a sense of betrayal around secrets being kept," she says, referring to family secrets of any nature.

In the bedroom

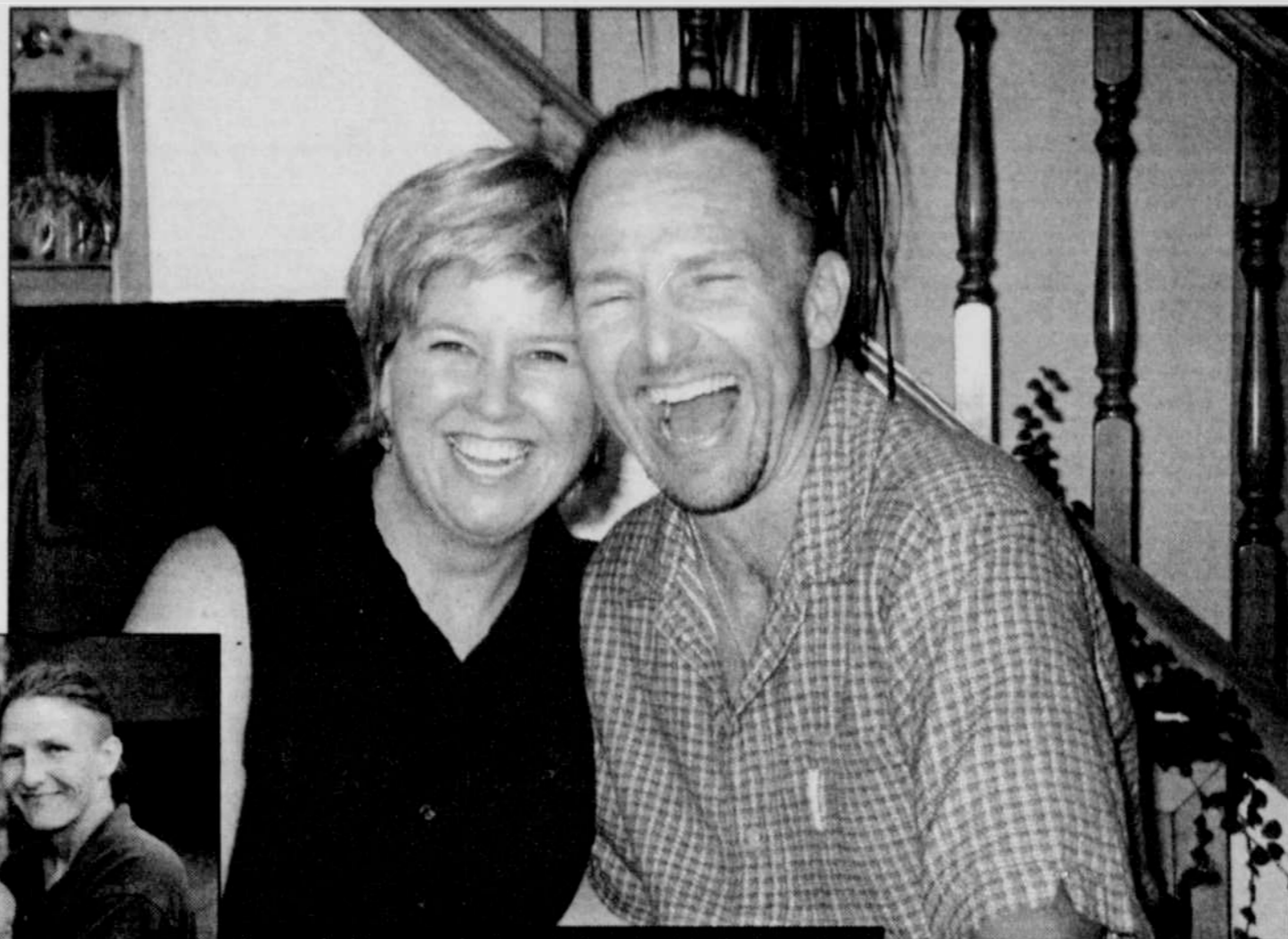
For all the couples, the transition affected their sex lives, some for the better, some not.

Sue says their sex life has improved. "We rarely hop into bed and spend less than two hours," she says. "We've always had a fairly non-traditional sexual relationship. We've had a lot of sexual contact that didn't involve penetration. We do a lot of cuddling. The quality has not lessened." In fact, Angela enjoys sex more, and the quality of her orgasm has improved.

Ani says that Theresa's sex drive has lessened since she started hormones and that her partner often does not want sex. "And dang, I do!" Ani exclaims.

Because they have an open relationship, Ani knows she has other options, if she chooses to act on them. She says that the frequency has decreased but that the sex is better now that Theresa is more honest with herself. "She's more into exploring her own sexuality and sensuality. She's more present in her body," Ani adds.

Bodies change from hormones. Pam was attracted to Markie's manliness and says: "We were really hot sexually, like five times a week



Angela exploring that side of herself "as long as there's no secrets."

Opportunity for personal growth

Most couples say that having a partner go through such a big transformation forced them to look at their own lives.

"When you're being challenged to look at who you are as a couple, it challenges who you are as an individual," says Sue, noting how her own self-confidence has grown. An overweight woman, she has started to wear clothing that shows off her cleavage a little, even though she has never worn anything like that previously. "I'm a better and happier Sue because Angela is a better and happier Angela," she says.

Both Devan and Brenda are committed to educating others. "Which is fortunate," she says, "because going through transition, you constantly have to answer people's questions."

Pam knows she hasn't quite grasped the lesson she is supposed to learn from all this. "It's so good to have a connection in life that you really value, what does it matter if I call him she? In the big picture it doesn't, but I've got a small part of myself that says it matters to me."

KATHY BELGE is a Portland free-lance writer.



PHOTO BY JAMES LOEWEN

Once a lesbian couple (inset), Brenda Schellenberg (left) and Devan Deuel still identify as queer, even though they now appear a straight couple—complete with house in the suburbs and two dogs

for a year and a half.... [Now] I just don't respond to him the way I did....

We never stopped having sex. It's just kind of dulled down."

Some people who change gender will also

change sexual orientation. For some couples this could mean an end to the relationship, but it doesn't have to be. Some couples may choose to stay together and not be sexual. Or, says Wolmark, couples may chose to explore polyamory. For instance, Sue says Angela has expressed a new attraction for men. She says she can live with



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