



Susan Faludi visits her father, Stefanie, in Budapest. Susan reunited with her estranged father after Stefanie's gender transition. PHOTO COURTESY OF SUSAN FALUDI

A journey of identity

Susan Faludi's new book, 'In the Darkroom,' explores the facades her transgender father hid behind

BY EMILY GREEN
STAFF WRITER

In 2004, Susan Faludi received news that her estranged father had recently transitioned into a woman. He was well into his 70s when he flew to Thailand for the surgery.

Steven re-emerged as Stefanie, or "Stefi," and she had reintroduced herself to her daughter via email, complete with photographs displaying her new look.

In an effort to become reacquainted with the parent she had grown up knowing as a domineering, macho and sometimes violent patriarch, Faludi soon embarked on a journey that would span the remainder of her father's life.

Her new book, "In the Darkroom," is a personal account of her investigation into her father's many identities.

It takes her from Portland to Budapest, where she's confronted with her family's history of Holocaust survival and the many masks her father hid behind.

Faludi is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and the feminist author of "Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women," which won the National Book Critics Award in 1991. She's written for The New Yorker, The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times, as well as other publications.

She will be at Powell's City of Books,

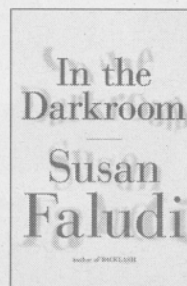
1005 W Burnside St., at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 28, for a book signing and reading followed by a discussion and question-and-answer session.

We began our interview with a couple of questions from Street Roots vendor Tina Drake, who, like Stefi, has become estranged from the daughter she fathered years ago.

When her daughter turns 18, Tina plans to reach out to her and will be faced with explaining her own gender transition.

Tina wanted us to ask Susan if she had any advice about how she might best break the news.

Susan Faludi: One hopes that by the time her daughter is older, that given the somewhat encouraging trends in culture, that maybe this won't even be a big deal. We are so much more open than even a few years ago. I look back when my father transitioned in 2004, and it was seen as this exotic phenomenon, whereas (now) there is so much more press, and generally more positive press. My recommendation – everyone's experience is different and of course it completely depends on what she's comfortable with, and what her daughter is comfortable with – but I think speaking openly and honestly is always the best



ticket. And speaking in person, I would say. Given that my father sent me an email from overseas, I would have appreciated a phone call, but then we hadn't been speaking for a while, so perhaps my father wanted to feel out the water first before diving in.

Emily Green: Tina also wanted me to ask you if you have any advice for how family members of someone seeking gender reassignment surgery might best cope with the change in their loved one?

S.F.: Keeping all lines of communication open. I can only speak for my own experience, and I have to say that my father's transition was really the least difficult part of us reconnecting. Much harder was dealing with all the baggage between us. There are a lot – and I know a lot – of trans people whose family members have fallen away, they claim, as a result of the transition. If you can keep talking, and show that you care, and that you don't want to be estranged, hopefully that message will finally get through. Most people, no matter how badly they react at first, want to come around and want to be close to their family. We all want family.

E.G.: As you explored your father's gender identity transformation, were there aspects of

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