

A Long History of a Short-Lived Magazine

As a teenager trying to understand why I wasn't comfortable in my male gender, I started seeking information that would educate me. There wasn't much: though the popular tabloids of the time liked to occasionally shock their readers with salacious tales of trans folks. There was Christine Jorgensen's autobiography, and there was Harry Benjamin's book, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*. For the most part, that's all there was. But when browsing a newsstand in my hometown of Bethlehem, PA, in 1968 or 1969, I ran across a copy of *Female Impersonator Magazine*, and screwed up the courage to buy it. This was at least something, and it kind of blew my 16-year-old mind. There were other people like me! Many of them were quite attractive! There was hope! Ironically, about six years later, I was the editor of *Female Impersonator Magazine*.

In 1972 I had started my medical transition during my senior year of college, at the age of 20. I combed Patee Library at Penn State for every book or journal article I could find on transvestism and transsexualism. There was a fair amount of medical and psychological literature, and being a psychology major, I wrote a lot of college papers on these topics <https://sandymesics.org/introduction-to-my-psychology-papers/>. But in the "popular" literature, there was very little, and as far as magazines and newsletters specifically by and for the trans community, there was scant stuff. I stumbled across Lee Brewster's excellent publication *Drag Magazine*. Through the personal ads I started reaching out to try and meet people like me.

But things quickly started to accelerate -- through *Drag Magazine*, I met Michael Floyd, a crossdresser who lived near Philadelphia, and was on his own quest for community. We hit it off immediately, though our backgrounds were vastly different. After graduating from college, with no real job prospects, I moved to Philly to become invisible in a large urban environment and pursue my transition. Michael and I became pretty good friends. I took a job working in a trendy downtown sandwich/cheese shop and supplemented it with a series of odd jobs that included selling produce for a street vendor near Rittenhouse Square. I lived in a shabby one-bedroom apartment on Walnut Street.

Michael had accumulated a pretty good collection of trans literature, as he was a bit older than me, and had access to the adult bookstores in Philly. He shared his stash with me, and I poured over these publications, drinking them in like a parched desert wanderer. In my opinion, most of these magazines were focused on professional female impersonators or drag queens. Crossdressers had a couple of publications: *Transvestia* and *Turnabout*. *Drag* magazine appealed to a wider audience, but I thought there was a niche for another publication: one that covered all that ground but focused a little more on the subject of transsexuality. I dreamed about putting together that magazine.



Michael liked the idea, and we agreed to start a magazine. We would both put up money, and I would be responsible for the editorial content, and Michael would handle sales and distribution. We called our company Third World Communications. In those cold war days, "third world" became a prejudicial way of describing poor or developing countries. We chose that name because we were both pretty poor, there was a lot of prejudice against

A Long History of a Short-Lived Magazine

trans folks, and we existed in a world that was neither straight nor gay: trans folks were residents of a “third world.”

I don’t recall why we chose the name *image* for our magazine. I think it was because we were trying to show a fresh, hip, and self-confident image of trans people. I liked having the name in all lowercase letters. I designed a logo for the magazine that was the male and female symbol in one. Cristan Williams called it “a proto-trans symbol.”



And we started producing *image*. For the first issue, I wrote all the copy and took most of the photographs. I did the layout and pasteup on my kitchen table. I had a cisgender female friend who could do some cartooning for me, and gradually I began to contact folks willing to write for the magazine. Even though we weren’t even nearly breaking even, I paid my contributors for their writing, photos, and illustrations.

I modeled *image* on *Playboy* magazine: I wanted image to include informational articles, news items, lifestyle pieces, reviews of movies, books, shows, some fiction, and a centerfold that would celebrate how beautiful trans women are. Although the magazine focused on trans women, our first issue had an article on trans men (VERIFY THIS).

The first issue was pretty crude. No typesetting, bad layout, but we did have Divine on our cover. Printing was done at our local Postal Instant Press, and the collating, folding, and saddle stapling were done on our kitchen table. I can’t remember our initial press run, but I think it was about 500.

Though Michael was in charge of distribution, I pitched in to try and promote the publication. I sent letters and copies to the other trans publications of the time, notably *Drag* and Neptune Productions, which put out a few trans magazines, as well as the aforementioned *Female Impersonator Magazine*. And that’s when things really got interesting. I sent a copy to Neptune Productions. At that time Sussie Collins was working there as editor, but looking to branch off and establish UTTS, the United Transvestite Transexual Society. Sussie invited me to one of their monthly gatherings, where I met Jack O’Brien, owner of Neptune Productions. Jack was helping Sussie get UTTS off the ground. Sussie and I both believed in unifying the trans community, rather than just appealing to one aspect of it.

Jack O’Brien thought that *image* had potential, but it was pretty crude. He offered me the use of his production facilities in return for me writing and doing some photo work for him. In no time, I was working full-time for Neptune Productions, and producing *image* in my spare time. In this way, I was able

A Long History of a Short-Lived Magazine

to make a (very) modest living while working in my chosen gender role while doing work that I truly enjoyed.

I believe I was probably the first full-time journalist covering the transgender community. I traveled all over the East Coast, covering drag balls, female impersonator shows, and unique events like Mardi Gras and the first ever Fantasia Fair. I wrote a lot of trans erotic fiction. And in the process, I met a lot of interesting people: John Waters, Divine, Elizabeth Coffee, Holly Woodlawn, Kenny Kerr, Bebe Scarpie, Lee Brewster, Ariadne Kane, Garrett Oppenheim, Pudgy Roberts, and more. Meanwhile, I learned a lot about graphic layout, darkroom work, paste-ups, and typesetting. We were trailblazing in many ways, including having the first ever in depth discussion of the term transgenderism.

One interesting thing about working for Neptune Productions while also producing *image*: Jack O'Brien had an immediate need for a digest sized magazine to send to our printers. He had no material, but I had an *image* magazine ready to go to press. So, we basically rebranded that issue, added a little more material, and presto: *image* became *TV Times* number 1. If you look through *TV Times*, you can easily see that it was *image*.

I think we produced about eight issues before we ended *image*. It was never financially successful, and I just didn't have the range or ability to work for Neptune and produce my own magazine. Outstanding subscriptions were fulfilled by Neptune Productions. Over the years, I lost many of my personal copies of *image* in my many moves and the occasional hurricane. I donated the remaining few to the Houston Trans Center.

References

Cristan Williams found my 1975 article on transgenderists:

<https://research.cristanwilliams.com/2012/06/02/the-transgenderist-explained-an-early-1975-article/>

<https://www.cristanwilliams.com/2012/12/01/the-prince-fountainhead-narrative-must-die/>