

# **The Woman I Was Not Born To Be**

*by Aleshia Brevard*

*Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA*

For those of us who became acquainted with the transgender experience only recently, this wonderful book is an eye-opener. In the 1950s and 1960s, most of us had never heard of a transsexual. Then there was Christine Jorgenson and the lurid press around her gender-related surgery.

“The Woman I was Not Born to Be” is Aleshia Brevard’s memoir as she travelled from a rural Tennessee “sissy boy” through her female impersonator days to her career as a highly regarded stage, screen, and TV actress and beyond. Honestly written with self-deprecation as well as appreciation and humor, this book shines a bright light on the early years of transsexual surgery and its aftermath.

Have any of my readers realized that a 1950s solution to excessively feminine boys was super-doses of testosterone? Did you know that in the early 1960s a male-bodied individual had to be castrated prior to SRS – else the testicles would be placed inside the body? Do you recall that policy, if not law, required female impersonators/cross dressers to wear at least three articles of gender-appropriate clothing or face imprisonment? No wonder so many transsexuals hid their reality and went stealth in their lives!

“The Woman I was Not Born to Be” shows how Aleshia’s low self-esteem in her youth was reinforced by her father and almost every male father or husband figure for many years, leaving her self-consciously striving to reflect the subservient female role required by the mid-1900s society. While quite successful in her theatrical life, her interpersonal relationships with many males – from boyfriends, neighbors, and husbands to various Hollywood agents and actors - also reinforced her lack of self-confidence as a woman. It was largely with the support of her mother, Mozelle, and her close friend Stormy Lee (a fellow transsexual/drag queen) that she eventually realized that she did not need to define herself as a woman based on the misogynistic social customs of the mid-twentieth century.

Highly recommended!

*Reviewed by Dave Parker*