

# **Pondering the Possible Connection Between DES and Mixed Gender Identity**

By Leef Smith

Wayne Beyer used to say he was a DES son. That was before the sex change operation. "Now I guess you could call me a DES daughter," said Beyer, 51, a retired ophthalmic surgeon from Chevy Chase, who made the transition to life as a woman earlier this year. Beyer, now known as Dana, said she knew from age 7 that she was a girl trapped in a boy's body. Her first and only menstrual period, at 12, confirmed that belief: While her reproductive organs appeared male, inside she had some female reproductive characteristics, she said. A doctor later told Beyer she had abnormalities consistent with a vestigial uterus. Beyer believes there is only one likely cause for the sexual anomalies that plagued her most of her life: DES. "I don't think it's any coincidence that my mother took a potent estrogen and an XY fetus ends up feeling like a woman" said Beyer. "Give frogs and fish estrogen and you get hermaphroditic changes."

While studies continue to examine whether high doses of prenatal estrogen can influence sexual orientation -- a study released in March concluded that it could not -- researchers say there are so few DES-exposed people with a combination of male and female sex organs that it is impossible to study the issue scientifically. Beyer, who runs an e-mail list for DES-exposed men and a subsidiary group for transgendered individuals, said she knows of 180 people who can document that they are DES-exposed, transgendered and "willing and eager" to serve as research subjects. Still, she said, "No one is interested in us. . . . DES is the worst drug disaster in American history, but no one wants to hear our

story. . . . No one had made an effort. We've been an afterthought in the studies."

In October a conference will be held at Tulane University, the fifth in a series of meetings on the environment and hormones. One topic researchers will consider is gender identity. "There's still a great interest in the topic among DES-exposed men," said John McLachlan, director of the Center for Bioenvironmental Research at Tulane. "Most published data has not found any effects. . . . It's been surprising to a lot of people, given the animal models that show [prenatal] estrogen is a very powerful determinant in sexual behavior." Beyer, who has two sons from her first marriage, said she doesn't need scientific proof to know her life was changed by DES, a drug she said "poisoned" her relationship with her parents. The relationship was mended earlier this year, Beyer said, when she stopped living as a man. Following facial and genital reconstruction, Beyer says her body is now as it should be: female. "My mother is now relieved of the guilt" about taking DES, Beyer said. "And we have a good family relationship for the first time in my life."