Know Yourself

Harry works down at the O-Zi-Ya Body Shop. He’s an artist with bondo, makes a ‘total’ look brand new after pulling the dents and replacing crushed quarter panels, has a real nice touch with an airless in the spray booth. Back about 4 years ago, Harry was a ‘he’. Six foot four, muscular in a lithe sort of way, moved car parts around like baskets of daisies. I didn’t know him real well, I guess, mostly because my beater cars never got treated to the Body Shop make-over. Dents, scratches, bullet holes ---- I’m not spending money for pigs’ lipstick.

So imagine my surprise when Harry walks up my drive during our annual Mother’s Day Studio Tour … in high heels, a tasteful above-the-knee pleated skirt, grey blouse and a matching handbag. “How you doing, man?” I ask nonchalantly and Harry explains, no doubt for the 1000th time, he’s no longer a man. Course, judging by the 5 o’clock shadow of a beard, he’s not quite a woman either. Which, he tells me earnestly, will take the hormone treatments some time to kick in.

Even on the live-and-let-live South End, this was, well , this was … different. And we’re accustomed to different. Harry toured the studio and we chatted it up and when he left I gave him a manly sort of hug and said, “Good luck, man,” and immediately corrected myself. Harry gave me a wink and a laugh and sallied forth down the drive.

Harry quit the Body Shop --- not because the boyz couldn’t deal with The Change --- they still speak fondly of him. Her. You know what I mean. She wanted a new life to go with the new her.

A couple of years ago I ran into Harry. Harriet now. She was installing fountains. Hauled the rocks, dug the ponds, wired the pumps, plumbed the waterfalls. “I’m an artist, Skeeter” she declared. She was welding sculptural components, creating light shows, running her own business. “Life’s good, then?” I asked.

She broke into a radiant smile, one I never saw at the Body Shop. Leaning down to whisper in my ear, she fairly bubbled, “It’s a joy my boy, it’s a joy!” All I can say is the path to happiness is a whole lot harder for some, even on the salty South End, but it isn’t impossible.