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TransNation: The Man Behind DykeTV

No one used to give a second thought to the behind-the-scenes producers of DykeTV, the nation's first cable access program "by for and about lesbians" founded in the early 90s. But when Julien Rosskam came out as trans, he knew that could all change. Not even sure if he *should* still be allowed to work in a dyke space, Rosskam tendered his resignation. Fortunately — for both the filmmaker and the acclaimed New York-based cable program — his boss refused to accept it.

"She said, essentially, that the times were changing and people need to change along with them," Rosskam remembers gratefully.

Part of that change, for Dyke TV, has been an expansion of their definition of 'women' to include "past, present and future female-bodied and/or identified."

Still, Rosskam — the director of the film *Transparent* — admits that there have been instances when people withdrew their support for the venerable lesbian program after learning that a transman was "not only working at Dyke TV, but was one of the few people running the place."

Roskam is saddened by what he calls "this chasm in the dyke/trans community," and he hopes that his work will further a reparative communication between the overlapping communities.

"It is a very touchy subject that I generally think people don't want to talk about," Rosskam explains. "People act like the conversation already happened, but the truth is it really never did."

Roskam is currently editing a documentary, *Boy I Am*, which addresses these issues by exploring "this notion that to transition from female to male is somehow inherently anti-feminist." *Boy*, Rosskam says, interviews FTMs, their partners, lesbians and academics about "their thoughts on transmen and how they fit or don't fit in the dyke community and the trajectory of the feminist movement." *Boy I Am* (www.boyiam.com) will hit the

Jacob Anderson- Minshall

GLBT festival circuit in Summer 2006.

Roskam's debut film, *Transparent*, was a hit at film fests last summer, where it earned rave reviews for its por-

Roskam's debut film, *Transparent*, was a hit at film fests last summer, where it earned rave reviews for its portrayal of female-to-male transgendered parents



Ricky and his son from California shown in a still from DykeTV producer Julien Rosskam's film *Transparent*.

trayal of female-to-male transgendered parents, and gained Rosskam kudos in *Curve* magazine's list of top ten emerging filmmakers. Focusing on universal themes of family and child-parent relationships, *Transparent* touched a broad audience, reaffirming queer viewers and prodding straight audiences.

"Seeing trans people in a parenting role," Rosskam argues, "Seems to somehow be disarming to straight folks who maybe were unsure of how they felt about [transgender parents]."

"I was dealing with my own issues of wanting to transition

and also wanting to have kids and not knowing how to reconcile that," filmmaker Jules Rosskam says, describing the impetus behind his documentary. "I knew I wanted to make a movie about the trans community but I didn't want to do another 'trans 101' film."

The auteur focused on FTM "mothers" because as he says, "Our culture puts a huge emphasis on women giving birth, and treats it as the most feminine thing one can do. So then you have to wonder what happens to our notions of gender when men are having babies."

Roskam calls the breadth of *Transparent* "anthropological" in its diversity. The 19 parents involved in the project came from 14 states, varying socio-economic backgrounds, and very different realities, providing a voice to a middle-American transgender community that often is overlooked.

"I was tired of this idea that trans people only live in big cities," Rosskam says. "Not to mention the [myth] that transmen are all white, well-educated on gender theory and middle- to upper-class. The film was a lot about deconstructing those stereotypes." Unfortunately for those who missed *Transparent* on its 2005 festival tour, the film is currently only available directly through Rosskam (info@transparentthemovie.com). Still, if you haven't seen the film, you should try to do so — even if that means pressuring a distribution company to add the beautiful, groundbreaking documentary to its roster. ▼