



Video

# *Transformative* **TIMES**

As a big-shot businessman-turned-trans woman and a trans rights advocate, Bobbie Huthart leads a full life...





*Serpenti* necklace, one-coil ring in 18K rose gold set with mother-of-pearl and pavé diamonds; *Serpenti* earrings in rose gold with alternating mother-of-pearl and full pavé diamonds, all by Bulgari

**A**t the age of 67, Robert Huthart, the son of a former Lane Crawford managing director, undertook gender reassignment surgery. Reinvented as Bobbie, she now lives in Thailand and is a keen campaigner for trans rights.

**What was it like growing up in Hong Kong in the '60s?**

Looking back, I have to say I have had a wonderful time and I loved every bit of it. My friends, my family, my life, I loved it all. Although I am actually one-third Chinese, I was looking to go to an English school, even though Cantonese was my first language. However, I failed to get in and I ended up going to Diocesan Preparatory School and then later to Diocesan Boys' School, which turned out to be great choices for me, as they happened to be the best schools in Hong Kong.

**Did being part of the high-profile Huthart family put any pressure on you while growing up?**

There was never really any pressure on me at any time. I actually had a number of great advantages. I could go anywhere and had the Lane Crawford brand backing me up. Being part of a well-off family meant I had everything I could have imagined or might possibly have needed.

**Was it always on the cards that you would join the family business?**

I always knew I'd enter the family business in one capacity or another. Ultimately, when I came back to Hong Kong after having qualified as a Certified Public Accountant and having worked in an investment bank

for a while, my father had just taken a stake in the company – Zenith Refinery and Pacific Palters – which did very well for us.

After that, I took on an investment role within the family business, initially focussing on Phuket real estate. At the time, this saw us buying land that no one else really wanted, which led to outstanding profits further down the line. I really enjoyed everything I did, and came to believe that, as long as you have conducted yourself with real zest and maintained a positive attitude, while treating people well, you could get anything done.

**Which projects are currently taking up your time?**

Well, we've recently entered the larger Thai real estate market. There's a bit of a property bubble at the moment, though, so we are taking a very cautious approach. As a consequence, we're looking at what other opportunities the company offers...

**Was there ever a time when you wondered if you would live long enough to accomplish everything you wanted to achieve?**

Obviously that's something we all have to address, but I am very lucky in that many in my family tend to live to be 100 or more. I have, however, set a schedule for myself, one that strikes me as quite reasonable. Generally, a surgery like the one I underwent would also take a toll on one's body. I am, however, blessed with good health and that has played a key part in my story.

**How do you view the world as a woman now, opposed to when you were living as a man?**

When you are transitioning, you start off by taking hormones and, all of a sudden, you begin to see the world in a dramatically different way. You also find yourself having the kind of conversations that you really couldn't have if you are a man. I find that women talk very openly with each other. I also think having lived as both genders has given me a truly unique understanding of their different perspectives on life. I believe only open discourse can unite the two for a better world.

**You came out to your family back in 2015. Looking back, is there anything you'd have done differently?**

I think if I had been a member of a later generation, if I had known I was transgender when I was younger,









This page: *Serpenti Tubogas* necklace in 18K rose gold set with pavé diamonds on the head and the tail; *Serpenti* earrings in rose gold with mother-of-pearl and pavé diamonds, both by Bulgari

Opposite page: *Serpenti* slim necklace in 18K white gold with full pavé diamonds by Bulgari



*“When you are transitioning, you begin to see the world in a dramatically different way”*

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it would have bothered me not to have transitioned earlier. I wasn't aware of all the possibilities and I think, in some ways, my ignorance was a kind of blessing. It ultimately allowed me to live two full lives in one lifetime.

**How accepting was your family to the idea of you transitioning?**

There are a lot of LGBTQ individuals in my family and, while I know sexuality is not meant to be linked to your genes, I wonder if that's true in our case. Perhaps, though, when you come from a liberal family, you're exposed to a broader agenda and you don't have people attacking you for thinking in a particular way. Nowadays, I think, as people are more exposed to LGBTQ communities, they are more accepting and realise that love is more about emotions than about gender.

**Do you think coming from an affluent background has given you a different experience as a trans woman compared to those less-advantaged?**

Well, the transgender women I talk to tell me I'm lucky because I come from a rich and accepting family. With that in mind, I try to speak out on behalf of all older transgender individuals, as well as for all elderly people in general. I want people to know they don't need to shrivel up and die when they reach a certain age.

While I believe trans women are able to secure jobs at the lower end of the pay scale, it's often difficult for them to progress. I also believe that this isn't a specific trans issue, but one that affects all women. As a result, we have to collectively fight for women's rights and move forward together.



**Are there any misconceptions about the trans community that you would like to tackle head on?**

I think the biggest misconception about the trans community – not only in Asia, but also on an international basis – is that it is inevitably linked to prostitution. As a Buddhist, I have no problem with prostitution, but, in general, it seems to carry a huge stigma. There is also the issue as to whether or not post-surgery you can “pass” as a member of your reassigned gender. In truth, being transgender is about what’s in your heart, rather than about your looks, and that’s what’s important.

**What do you hope the 21st century will deliver in terms of transgender rights and acceptance, particularly within the Asian community?**

The men I went to prep school with all know about me and, while many of them wish me well, a lot just don’t know enough about transgender issues or about me. I hope they read this and other similar articles and come to understand the points being made. Ultimately, I just want to get my point of view across without offending anyone. I just want us to be accepted.

In the case of China, I think the process of gradual change has to begin and I believe the next generation will come to accept transgender people. So much of its culture is male-centric, with every mother-to-be wanting a boy. What happens, though, when that boy wants to be a girl? At the end of day, people need to be allowed to transition and to then be accepted.

I also believe in order for transgender people to win the hearts and acceptance of society, we must continue to do good deeds, and recognise that if we push too hard, especially in Asia, for rapid law changes, this could lead to more discrimination and hate.

**Is there anything you are currently campaigning for?**

Well, I currently run a foundation that aims to help transgender people in Thailand. Initially, I thought surgery always topped the agenda

*“Being transgender is far more about what’s in your heart than about how you look”*

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for trans people, but I’ve since found that isn’t necessarily the case. Sometimes, the bigger priorities are education, medication and support from doctors. And so, the foundation’s focus is now on financing education, and funding seeding capital and venture capital businesses run by trans people in Thailand. Our foundation has no name, and thus, no ego.

**Living in Thailand, what is it about the culture that appeals to you?**

I look at relocating from Hong Kong as a way of starting a new life, one that won’t embarrass the people who knew me before. Since moving to Thailand, I’ve become far more outgoing, friendly and caring. While it doesn’t offer the kind of luxury lifestyle that Hong Kong does, there is kind of peace that you can find there.

**As a Buddhist, how important is your religion to you?**

The process of becoming a Buddhist took me on a long journey and has helped me to make amends for some things I did while I was a man. It’s given me a kind of peace that not everyone is granted. Essentially, being a Buddhist has helped me to become comfortable with who I am. I have realised that the most important thing in life isn’t being wealthy or famous, but being a good person.

**Finally, what’s left on your personal bucket list?**

Really, I just hope to live long enough to help more people, not just for their sake, but also for my own. I am also still trying to become far less egocentric. That’s one of the biggest challenges I have ever had to face and it’s an ongoing battle.

**Thank you.** ☺



