



**I AM.**

**Stories from transgender  
and non-binary people  
across the world**

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# CONTENTS

Foreword	6
Adam, Scotland	9
Yusra, Pakistan	20
Anonymous, Scotland	23
Eweryst, Poland	31
Claudio, Portugal	37
Mina, Malta	46
Sasha, Serbia	54
Vera, Nigeria	64
Alec, Sweden	67
Annu, Finland	79
Jess, Scotland	91
Ely, Scotland	98
Laurynas, Lithuania	102
Satya, Sri Lanka	107
Andre, Portugal	112
Patrick, Romania	134
Elaine, Scotland	148
Rylee, Scotland	159
Sarah, Scotland	163
Kenneth, Russia	186
Daniela, Portugal	197
Sabrina, Netherlands	204
James, Brazil/UK	225
Nikki, Scotland	233
Stevie, Scotland	240
Lyndsay, England	247
Afterword	253
Acknowledgements	254

# FOREWORD BY JO CLIFFORD

Perhaps the worst thing I suffered when I was young was that I felt so completely alone.

I was born in the 1950s and nothing then was ever written or said about being trans. There was no information anywhere. There were no words to describe me and nothing to help me understand who I was.

The few representations of people like me that I came across in plays or films or books showed me I was grotesque and ridiculous. Profoundly sick and often downright evil.

I felt so horribly ashamed of who I was that I really believed that if anyone found out about me I would die.

For in those places and times when the world around us hates and fears us for being trans and we are made to feel horribly isolated and alone, it does something worse to us as well. We internalise the hatred and prejudice that surround us and part of us believes that it is true.

And so we hate ourselves. We feel we're worthless, disgusting somehow, and a huge part of our struggle to live is bound up with our struggle to discover our self worth.

The one thing that saved me was the fact that something within me drove me to become a writer.

Creativity saved my life.

And even though I'm successful now, and living and working openly as a woman in ways I could never have hoped or imagined, creativity is still central to my life and

the writing and performing of EVE has done so much to heal me.

I hope that's also true of everyone who has contributed to this beautiful book.

In 2008, James Morton and the Scottish Transgender Alliance helped me run a writers' group for trans people, and we spent several months meeting every week to tell each other our stories and craft them into pieces of writing we could share with the world.

The experience affected all of us very deeply. I'll never forget the day I was sent a poem from one of the participants who told me how despairing she'd been feeling the previous night and had been on the point of self harm when she stopped herself and wrote the poem instead.

That made it so beautiful on so many levels.

Because there is something so powerful about telling one's own story, and hearing the stories of others who share our experience.

For discovering the capacity to tell one's own story means learning to value it. And valuing our stories helps us learn to value ourselves.

And to do so in a way that breaks down our isolation.

I know my life and art has been so enriched by hearing the story of Adam Kashmiry and by working alongside him.

We are so different in so many ways and also, deep down, so very much the same.

It moves me so profoundly to hear of the suffering he endured in Alexandria when he was forced to live as a girl because it so profoundly chimes with my sufferings in North Staffordshire when I was forced to live as a boy.



Like me, he was completely cut off from the information that would have helped him make sense of who he was and that only added to his suffering.

I'm sure that, like me, having access to a book like this one would have been the most profound help.

But this book is important also, because it reaches out to everyone, just as our performance did.

The prejudice we have all suffered from is held in place by ignorance. By an inability to understand us as human beings.

Everything that communicates the reality of what it feels like to be trans helps counter that ignorance and undermine that prejudice.

So what we find here are stories that have immense value in themselves, as art for art's sake.

But this is also more. This is art as activism. This has the potential to change the world.

# ADAM, SCOTLAND

**For many trans people, the first they know of their identity is in childhood, when the clothes and the toys they are given, the way the adults around them say that their life will go, don't fit them. For some, trying to fit into these expectations can lead to severe depression and self-harm. In this visceral piece, Adam, who inspired and played in the NTS show, Adam, writes about growing up with such feelings and being told that they would pass.**

When I was 4 years old, I kicked and spat on a lot of human beings for calling me my birth name. It angered me so much that no one was calling me Mustafa?! (A boy's name) I happened to see my neighbour peeing standing up for the first time when I was about 5 years old. He didn't bother to close the door, and I couldn't help but wonder why the heck I had been peeing sitting down all this time when I could pee standing up! So I tried it and didn't work. I wet myself.

When I was about 7 years old, my aunt tried to buy me my first dress. I cried, I refused to wear it. I hated it. I just wasn't comfortable. It looked nice as far as I can remember, but I hated seeing myself in it. I couldn't explain why I hated it, but I knew this wasn't something for me. Around that time I changed the name I chose for myself from Mustafa to Amr. I didn't tell anyone this time. I had a feeling I shouldn't be communicating anything like this again.

At the age of 9, I dreamed I looked like a boy. In my dream, I was scared of people seeing me because I didn't know how I would explain that I look like a boy all of a sudden, but I was so excited in the dream that I was jumping when I woke up. Around that time, I changed my name again, and called myself Youssef. Still, no one knew.

I didn't start to grow my hair longer until I was about 12, because then I was starting to realise I wasn't acting like the rest of the girls. It was all fun when I was young and innocent, but when I was growing older people started to notice and gossip.

I needed to fit in. Last thing I wanted was rumours. I didn't want to be that kid that everyone made fun of. No one does!

I kept holding on to what people told me when I was young, that I was eventually going to become a proper woman once my body developed.

I thought that's when things would get fixed. Puberty! Just wait for puberty. It will happen. I will stop having those weird dreams where I am always a boy. I will start to talk softer and walk more like a girl. I will feel like a girl.

Time goes by, puberty is here. Age 14. I had been waiting so long for this moment, to be "normal", I expected to at least get excited! Puberty meant things were finally going to feel right, like a missing piece in the puzzle. I think I knew that puberty wasn't the piece I was missing, because I dreaded the moment as soon as it came.

Optimistic as ever, I still hoped it would make things right. To make me feel like I belonged to the body I had. People were right, puberty does make things happen fast! My body started changing fast from that point on; I on the

other hand wasn't changing at all.

I thought, I should probably make some effort like everyone else. With the nice clothes, the makeup and all that stuff, so I bought nice feminine clothes. I started to put eyeliner on, it was the only thing I could bear to put on my face. Maybe some lip balm, I liked that stuff. It tasted nice, especially the watermelon flavoured ones.

I made new friends, and I was getting distracted by all the new things I was learning about the world as a young adult, however things started to get a bit complicated when I realised I was falling in love with my best friend. I freaked out, naturally. I thought I was a lesbian. That was the only thing I knew and was aware of at the time that could explain my feelings. I wasn't having that though, lesbian or not, this wasn't happening, not to me.

I was brainstorming, maybe I wasn't making enough effort. Maybe I needed to hook up with a boy or something to fix myself before things get too weird.

If I kiss a guy I will probably get those womanly feelings I was dying to feel. I met a guy, like, twice and kissed him. I was really desperate, I don't think I even liked him! But I had to do this, I was on a mission. Here we go, kiss him I was thinking. Just do it, you will probably feel much better when you do it. Not one bit of it felt nice, in fact; I felt a bit nauseous kissing him. He was clean and all, I just didn't have any desires to kiss him.

My hopes crashed, that kiss was meant to be my saviour, that kiss was meant to fix me!

The come down was unbearable. Still, I was so optimistic. I always have been. I thought maybe I needed to kiss another guy I really liked. I continued to act, look, dress, walk, talk

feminine. I was working really hard to fit in. I was making genuine effort to be alright.

At certain points, I couldn't ignore how I was feeling, but I didn't know how or what it was yet. The thought of being a boy inside a girl's body was so irrational that I couldn't even think about it long enough. Still, I couldn't ignore that something wasn't right. I have had my period, I have tried to walk softer, I've tried wearing women's clothes. I even kissed guys trying to discover my femininity in them. I look like a woman, why the heck am I not feeling like one!

Things got even tougher. I indulged myself in drugs and alcohol. I found comfort in them I have never found in anything else before. Until that point, I never enjoyed anything. Life had no flavours. Joy was a strange concept, so to actually find something that made me feel good was something to never let go of.

Putting all pieces of the puzzles together. My dreams of being a man. My desire to father a child rather than to mother a child, and the fact that I didn't want to be a girlfriend of the girl I loved. The thought of her or anyone touching my body made me wanting to hurt people. There is no way I was a lesbian, it didn't fit the way I was feeling. Can the soul of a man be trapped in the body of a woman? NO! Of course not, that's crazy. Maybe I was just crazy. Maybe I was born with a rare disease, and I happened to be a boy that got caught in this body. I have never heard about someone feeling this way, never met anyone remotely similar. I was the only one in the world, no one like me. I must be crazy.

Fast forward to my first job in a fashion store. I liked my crew, we hung out and had fun. Some of my pals were pretty cool. Two of which eventually came out to me as gay

because they thought I was open minded. I definitely didn't disappoint them. I was cool with it, I didn't see a reason not to be. I too wanted to say something, to them or to anyone. It's so crazy to even think about it, how was I gonna say it?! One night, after a much needed high, I told them I was not what they thought I was. I stated that I didn't like boys, but I wasn't a lesbian either. I said I feel like a man somehow trapped in this body. After a bit of silence, they started asking questions. They asked how I knew I wasn't a lesbian if I liked girls? I explained, I hated my body; I imagine I am a man when I want to be with a girl. They laughed, my pal said he thinks I am a lesbian in denial. I tried to defend myself but no one was having it. I was really running out of patience. So eventually and aggressively I replied: "Okay. Hook me up with a girl, we will kiss. I will like it, but the moment her hands touch my body, I will cut them off." That was pretty convincing but not enough. After all, it does sound crazy if you have never heard of it before.

Self-harm comes in many ways. Cutting yourself isn't the only self-harm option. You would be surprised! I abused drugs and alcohol so much on a daily basis for years, and overdosed more than I care to remember. Never once did I wake the next day and think of quitting or even have a day off of it.

I also loved punching hard surfaces: rocks, granite and metal. Loved it was an understatement. The pain I felt in my hands was oddly so comforting. I think as the pain became so intense in my hands, it distracted me from what I was feeling internally. Anything that distracted me from the pain I felt was worth hanging on to.

I could probably write more about the daily harassments

I had from strangers, and the not so subtle ones from pals, but that would take pages to describe. Pain was literally everywhere and in everything I saw and felt.

Today I am 26. I still feel the same way I did when I was 3 years old. Nothing has changed. Well, except for the way I look. I have been transitioning for 6 years now. I look a lot like myself. I have a wife and my name is Adam.

I chose Adam just before I turned 15. It felt right, like never before. I never changed my name again.

At the age of 3 I felt it. At 6 years old I felt it. 10 years old I also felt it. At 15, at 20 I felt it. And now, I still feel it. I have always felt this way. No one brainwashed me. I haven't changed my mind one day and decided to become a man. I acted like a boy before I even understood gender or sex. I am the happiest I have ever been. I finally understand what "happy" feels like. Transitioning was no walk in the park, but it was definitely worth my while. I look forward to tomorrow and the adventures I shall encounter. I can live in peace now.

وأرسلهم الناس وجوه على بصرق الكنت كانت في الرابعة أو الخامسة من عمري حين الذي ولدت بالاسم ننادون لكلم الكلم أن تترتان الصغير ايلق قدمها يمكن بأقصى أن مصطفي؟! يدعونني جدا ليا يوجد لقد كان يعضبني كعشيء، لم الكنت أفهم لمأذبه من بالاعديد الكعشير في هذا العمر لكن أعماهي وعماتي اخبروني حقا ان اتذكر يبا. كيف كنت ابصر بوجوههم حين شقرق في الثانية عشرنت كعحين القمص الجميع اعتقد ذلك مزاح، لقد كان بالاسم الذي ولدت به وليس مصطفي. نينادون لقد وجدت سماع هذه القصص مريحا ذلك بنت اشتهار الاقل كحسنا، على كذا وان عقلي فقط، الوضوح كان اجرا شديدا يذ ما أشعر به. لم استطع تم. ومزجها معا ه يتجاهل أن اختار الصغير الجاهل

في عمر الخامسة أو السادسة، وللمرة الاولى، رايت احدا من جيراني يتبول فيس عنزي إلا أن أتساءل عن السبب ملو. إغلاق البابل لم يكلف نفسه عناء. واقفا ي استطع القيام بهذا واقفا!! ننا أتبول جالس كل هذا الوقت رغم الذي جعلني تبللت نفسي. قذف. المحاوله ولم تتحل ذلك حاولت

في عمر السادسة أو السابعة، حاولت عمدتي أن تشتري لي أول فستان. بكيت على ما كان فستانا جميلا. لارتي احب اشعر ورفضت أن ارتديه. كنت أكرهه. لم أذكر. فقط لم يناسبني.

في هذا الوقت غيرت الاسم الذي اخترته لنفسني من مصطفي الي عمرو. لم أخبر لم يكن خيارا صائبا لكن لا أعلم لماذا أحد. كنت أعلم انه يجب الا أخبر احدا وقتها. وقتها قمت بهذا

أن يراني يبدو كصبي. في الحلم كنت خائفا أني حلمت في عمر التسعة، لكنتي كنت متحمسة، فجأة لأنني لم الكنت أعرف كيف أشرح أنني يبدو صبي الناس استيقظت من النوم اقفز فرحا حتى جدا

هذا سرري وما زال في ذلك الوقت، غيرت اسمي مرة اخرى وسميت نفسي يوسف. الصغير.

، حقا احببت ذلك. لكن في عمر الثانية قصعير عندما كنت الاستحمام كنت احب درعا. كالت أمي منزعجه من عدم استحمامي الاستحمام عشره كان أو الرابعة عشرة



لكنني عجزت عن شرح ما في الأمر. كان جسمي يتغير، ولم أحب النظر لعدده أيام  
التيه لفكرة طويلة.

لم أجعل مثلهم وأبدو مثلهم. لم ألبس. دوما كنت أرثدي لظالم أرتد أن الكون فتى  
لأنني بدأت أدرك أنني لا أتصرف شعري طويلا حتى سن الثانية عشرة. ذلك  
كف شيء ممتع عندما تكون صغيرا وبسريا، لكن عندما تكبر. بقية الأطفال  
كان من الضروري أن أجاري الوضع، لكن وإثارة الشرائع أتبدأ الناس في الملاحظة  
تريد أن تصبح أنك تظن. طبيعية الكوناج مساعدة نفسي في الوقت ذاته أحت  
لأن حياتهم أكثر متعة، لكن لكل ذلك سيبدو سخيفا بمجرد أن يبدأ جسمك فتى  
أن لكل ظننت. اعتقدت لكافة حقا... أو ربما هذا ما سأشعر، أنني اعتقدت. في النضوج  
شيء سيئته هي حينها.

سن البلوغ! سأنتظر حتى البلوغ. حتما سيحدث. ستستوقف هذه الأحلام  
التي الكون فيها ولدا. سوف أتحدث بطريقه أكثر نعومة وأمشي بطريفة الغريبة  
تبانني فتاة أكثر أنوثه. سأشعر.

ومثل عديدي مثلني لأنه معلومات كافيّة لأمر قاسي. على أن تكبر دون أن تحصل  
غير منطقي. أو ربما أسوء من ذلك، في الواقع إنك تشعروا أنت أنت تكبر آخرون،  
وجسمك إنك مضطرب ذهني حين تدرك أنه مما حاولت أن تتقنع نفسك أنك تظن  
لكذلك. ما في الواقع ليس هو الجنس، نفس

. رغم طبيعيتي الكون اللحظة عبر الرابعة عشرة. لظالم أنتظرت هذه. إنه البلوغ  
فعل. ما زلت أمل في التغيير الذي سيحدث، ذلك اعتقدت ذلك لم أشعر بالحماسة.  
ة. طبيعيتي في النهاية لأشعر.

اللحظة بدأ جسدي يتغير بسرعة. ومن ناحية أخرى أنا لم أتغير على تلك ذن  
الاطلاق. ظننت أنني ربما يجب أن أبذل بعض الجهد. ذهبت للخارج وأشترت  
عيني، كان الشيء الوحيد الذي في جملة. بدأت في وضع الكحل نسائي قبل لبس  
هذه، أعجبني فيمكن أن أتحمّل وضعه على وجهي. ربما بعض من أحمر الشفا  
بنكهة البطيخ. التي تتلك ولأسيما لطيفا، الأشياء، كان مذاقها

أنني أحب الفتيات، هذا عندما أصبح وبدأت لاحظ، صداقات جديدة لقد صنع  
ربما لا أبذل ما يكفي من الجهد! أنا بحاجة أن أحملها. الكثير التعامل مع تلك الأمور  
ربما سأحصل على تلك المشاعر الأنثوية للارتباط بفتي. بحاجة لتقبيلها.  
وقمت بتقبيلها. كنت مرتين، ربما أحدهم التقيت بأشعر بها. لأسعى جاهدة التي  
في كنت أن أفعل هذا، على! لكن كان أتقبل أنني حتى حقا أي شيء، أنا لا اعتقد  
ن أول لم يسعني إلا الشعور بعدم الارتياح. لك البعض، مدمم. بدان تقبيل بعضهم

لرهه لذللكممن يقبلني، ومع ذلك لم استطع التوقف عن التفكير في مقدار  
 بيذما كنت أقبله. أمالي تحطمت بشدة، فحتلك القُبلة كانت من المفترض أن  
 ط الذي أحسرت به كان لا ! لكن الأحاباصلحني أن تفترض. كان المنقذتي تكون م  
 حتملي .

للغاية. لقد كنت دوم لذلك. اعتقدت ربما احتاج إلى ة كنت متفائلذلك،ومع  
 المشي، اللبس، النظر، التصرف،تقبيل شخص حقا احبه. ما زلت استمر في  
 ولم أكن أبحت هذا، على والتحدث بيمينتهي الأنوثة. كنت أعمل بجد لعبير للثأقلم  
 يقوم بذلك أحدعن أي مشكلة. فلا

لكن لم أكن أعرف كيف أو ماذا كان حتى اشعر ، تجاهل كيف كنت استطيعدع الم  
 لدرجة أنني منطقي أمر غيراة. إن التفكير في أن تكون صبي داخل جسم فتالآن  
 ان مناك أتمك من تجاهل ال،والا زلت. لم استطع حتى التفكير فيه لفترة طوية  
 مشي، لقد حاولت أن أفكرالشهريه، لقلقد أنتنني الدورة صحح. غيرشيء  
 الكتشف ل لقد حاولت ارتداء ملابس نسائية. حتى أنني قبلت رجال انغومة،الكفر  
 ذلكبإمارة، لكن تبعا لماذا ل اشعر كأنوثتي فيهم! أنا أبود.

المخدرات والكحوليات. أصبحت الأمور أكثر صعوبة. لقد اغرقت نفسي في  
 لعلما، لعلما لكبرتلقد وجدت الراحة التي لم أجدها في أي شيء آخر جربته من قبل.  
 الوحده الش عور ب لعلما زاده الكشوقابلت اشخاصا

كانت فيمافني حوالي السابعة عشرة، لم يكن لدي أي خيار سوى التفكير  
 لذلك، في جسد امرأة. ونتيجة تجز مع مشاعري بلكوني رجل محولأشفق اشعر به.  
 كان علي أن أتفق مع حقيقة أنني مجنونة.  
 بالطريقة كانت فكرة مجنونة. فانا لم أسمع عن شخص يشعر شيء.بعد كل  
 ة. مجنونحتما ان لا أحد مثلي...العال،م، في ةالوحيدي التي اشعر بها. كنت نفسها  
 كنت أغرق نفسي الكثير في المخدرات. حصلت على وظيفة في متجر للآزياء.  
 هو نخرج معا واستمتعتنا بوقتنا. كان مديري راىغا ايضاً. العمل، لكن احبب طاقم  
 لي كمثليين فقد كانوا يعتقدون بان عقولي أنفسمموصديق آخر له قدموا  
 ولم أري سببا يمنع ذلك، جدا ةظنهم. كنت متفهممنفتح. وأنا بالثالكيد لم أخيب

لعم أو لأي شخص..... من الچنون حتى التفكير شيء، أنا أيضا أردت أن أقول  
 كيف سأقوله؟! وفي ليلة من الليالي، بعد شرب الكثير من المخدرات الأمر، في  
 والكحوليات، أخبرتم أنني لست الشخص الذي تعتقدون. أخبرتم أنني لا أحب  
 لكنني لست مثلية. أشعر لرجل محاصر بطريقة ما في هذا الجسد. الأولاد،  
 بتوقفنا في مكاننا المعتمد للحصول على المزيد من بعد قليل من الصرمت  
 النبوي، بدانا نتحدث، سألوا كيف أعرف أنني لست مثلية إذا كنت أحب  
 لأنني أكره جسدي، أنتصرون نفسي رجل عندما أريد أن أكون مع قلت، الفتيات؟  
 بذلك الاعترافلكن ترفضين. وقال مديري أعتقد أنك مثلية ضحكوا، فت  
 كان صبري قد نفذ حقا. لذلك في النهاية قلت فيفهم حاولت أن أذافع لكن لا أجد  
 ،ذلك أحب حسنا. رتب لي لقاء مع فتاه، سرتبادل القبلات، وسوف عصبية "ب  
 " سأقطع جسدي، ولكن في اللحظة التي تلمس في يديها

هو الخيار الوحيد لتؤدي ذاتك. ليس نفسك جرح طرق عديدة. له إيذاء النفس  
 الكثر من حفلاتك في نهاية الأسبوع. والكحول، ستفاجأ! لقد غرقت في المخدرات  
 اتناول يومها الكثير من المخدرات أو الكحوليات أو كليهما. كل يوم وطول اليوم  
 في الحديقة في أن أشكر. اهتمل بضع سنوات. تناولت جرعات زائدة الكثر مما  
 لدرجة أنني كنت أظن أنني زائده للغاية العديدي من المرات كنت اتناول جرعات  
 . جمعي عدم في نفس الليلة. كانت وهيدروين وحشيش ونبيذ وفسودكايير. بأموست  
 تملك واحدة من الليالي التي ظننت فيها حقا أنني سأموت. لم يكن تقويوا عادي  
 كان الكثر من ذلك بقليل. ولكني لم أكتثرث. وابدأ لم الوضع، أخرج من هذا حتى  
 احتسيت إذا ما أن على عكس الالاقلاع. استيقظ في اليوم التالي وفكرت في  
 واحد نفسي شربت، استيقظ في اليوم التالي مع مخلفات ما المشروبات، بعض  
 بعدم شرب مرة أخرى!

مثل الصخور الصلبة، أحببت لكم الأسطح. وقد كان لدي أيضا شغف آخر  
 الذي اشعر الالم ف. أحبه" يعتبر ثقليلا من الأمراني " قول والجرانيت والماندن.  
 اعتقد زملائي أنني كنت غريبة. وقد كنت لدرجة غريبه في يدي كان جريحا  
 كذلك، ولكنه لم يكن لهذا السرب! داخل.  
 داخل. أشعر به عمال ذهني ينصرف جعي يدي، عندما يصبح الالم شديدا في ف  
 أفضل شيء. عنديبه، يصبح اشعر الالم الذي اي شيء يصرف عنني

المفكرة وتلك ان اقول لك المزيدي عن المضايقات اليومية من الغرباء، استطيع  
 . كان العالم في كل مكان وفي وصفحات لاصرفه صفحات يحتاج زملائي، لكن هذا من  
 كل شيء اراه واشعر به.

في تزلت اشعر نفس الشّعور عندما كنت وم اوعشرين، السادسة عمري في اليوم  
 . لقد تحولت قلبي لماما يزيدي مظهره يباس تشناء حسنا، الثالثة. لم يتغير شيء  
 . عندي زوجة واسمي آدم. انا ابدو ككثيرا مثل نفسي سنوات خمس عن

علي بانني وقتها عام. شعرتة عشرة لقد اخترت آدم قبل ان يصبح عمري خمس  
 لم اغير اسمي مجددا. وكما لم يحدث من قبل. حق،

العاشر كذلك. في عمر السادسة شعرت بذلك. في عمر في عمر الثالثة شعرت ب  
 شعرت بذلك. في عمر الخامسة عشر شعرت بذلك. في عمر العشرين شعرت بذلك.  
 ببغسل دماغه. لم احد لم يقيم اثمن شعرت بذلك. لقد شعرت داوما بالطريقة ذاتها. وما زلت  
 اغير رأيي ليوم واحد. تصدقت لكصبي قبل ان افهم النوع او الجنس. لقد ولدت  
 "LGBTIQ"الجنسية" متحيرين بشأن الهوية " هكذا. لا احد يختار المشقة. نحن  
 يقول الناس اننا نختار العيش بهذه الطريقة. لا احد. لاننا ولدنا بهذه الطريقة  
 او لكونه اقلية يتم تجاهلها دون احترام، المضايقة او المشقة، يختار

لان هذا ما قاله لي الناس بطريقة ما او هذه القطعة " رغبة سوف تهر". سميت لقد  
 وبالكافي لن تهر. انها ان رغبة، باخرى. انها ليست

# YUSRA, PAKISTAN

**Even in places where there are many trans people, conservative families can force their children into hiding their identity. Trans people who are not accepted in their families or society can find themselves in heartbreaking situations, at risk from the people they love and live with.**

I am a gay man and due to a conservative society and family I am not able to come out as a trans woman. I like to wear women's clothes, talk like a girl, I like to wear women's shoes but not openly. Just in the closet. When I dress like this I feel that I am a girl, it feels comfortable and makes me happier than any other thing. I want to fly as a girl and wear women's clothes and go out and live like a woman. My trans woman's name is Yusra. I have known I was a woman since I was child. I used to wear my sister's clothes when I was 4 years old. I used to wear my mother's shoes and dupatta, pretend I was a small girl and wear makeup and dance to music.

At my cousin's wedding I wore Pakistani wedding dress and danced in front of everyone. It was my last night of cross dressing. I was 18 years old and at the time I had a long bob but now I am clean shaven. The very next day my mother brought me to the barber to cut all my hair off. She shouted

at me that if I ever wore those clothes again or danced like that in public that she would punish me very hard and never let me go anywhere. My father even beat me that night with a pipe. From then on I started to live two lives.

There are lots of trans people in Pakistan. They run away from home and live with other trans women. They beg in the street and do sex work. I cannot do that because I have very strict parents. I live with my parents as a man. I have a small beard, hairs on my body and wear men's clothes. I have always wanted to run somewhere but because I don't have many resources and I'm HIV positive it's not possible. Frankly speaking, I don't know what is next, it is dark.

I am doing my masters in project management from a well known university and I'm on my last semester in an evening programme. I want to manage LGBT related projects because I always feel more comfortable with my community or with women. My dream project is to do work with HIV positive people as they face a lot of problems especially those facing many stigmas, for example, being HIV +ve, Muslim and LGBT, and also those from poor families. I am Muslim, as are the majority of Pakistanis. There is nothing related to trans people in the Quran, only Men and Women. The 'other' has no place, that is why there are so many issues for LGBTs.

I met with my handsome boy in 17 July, 2004 in Lahore. We used to meet on a daily basis because we liked each other's presence. After a month he asked me to be his wife and I accepted. We use to talk on landline numbers every day and tried to meet daily or every second day, we used to travel together, eat together, go to parties together and enjoyed life



happily as a couple.

Two years later, we fought a lot on an issue and he slept with another guy. He also took drugs that night. After two days he came to me and told me everything about the night but I forgave him because I really loved him and he loved me a lot. In June 2009, he was doing a PHD in Sociology and that time I was graduating and had a part time job as well. He was sick and took all kinds of tests from a private, well-known, medical test laboratory and he was diagnosed HIV +ve. Nobody gave him any Pre or Post counseling for the HIV test. That evening he called me and we talked about our first meeting and our proposal day and all the happy moments. After that he cried and asked me to forgive him for everything he had done wrong to me. I replied “What has happened to you? I have no hard feelings for you and we are living happily. Please leave all past hard feeling behind.” I asked him again and again, “What happened to you? Why are you so upset and nervous?” But he did not tell me anything and he hung up the phone.

After five minutes, I decided to go to his house. Thirty minutes later, I reached his house and when I opened the door to his room I saw that he had hanged himself from his fan and he was dead. It was a very difficult time for me and his family and when I saw on table the reports and saw he was HIV +ve, that was another piece of shocking news. A friend suggested I get a HIV test as well, so I visited a private laboratory and the next day I was also diagnosed HIV +ve. It was another piece of shocking news but I survived, and faced a lot of issues from conservative Pakistani Muslim culture, from my family.

# ANONYMOUS, SCOTLAND

**The attitude of society to trans and non-binary people has improved over the years, but people still run the risk of being rejected not only by strangers but by their own family. In this moving piece, an Adam World Choir member talks about her fears, her resolve, and her hope for the future.**

When I was around 14 my school was organising a camping trip, and the teacher told me that I wasn't allowed to be in a tent with my exclusively female friends. At the time I didn't know why it bothered me so much. It seemed that I should have just accepted it. All the other boys who were friends with girls did. But I was angry. I wanted to scream in the teacher's face and I didn't know why, and that confusion made me even angrier.

"Isn't this bullshit," I whispered to one of my friends. Her look of surprise made me deeply uncomfortable.

"It's not bullshit," she replied, "Of course boys and girls have to sleep in different tents. Girls don't want to sleep in a tent with a boy." That was reasonable, wasn't it? So why was I so indignant?

"It's not like we will be in different camp sites or anything;



we'll spend most of the trip together anyway. It's just where you're sleeping," she added, seeing my discomfort. But that wasn't the problem was it? It didn't matter how much of the time I spent with my friends because I was the only one of us that didn't get to sleep in the tent with the rest. I was being singled out and treated differently. It was unfair. But why did none of the other boys seem to mind it?

About a year after this I realised that the problem was that I am transgender. The camping trip stands out to me as the first time my assigned gender distinctly interfered with what I wanted and how I felt. It wasn't nearly the first sign, but it was the first one that I noticed. When I finally realised that I wasn't a male I repressed it. I refused to accept it. Being trans isn't a real thing: I have a penis, so I am a boy. My father's words that he had told me almost a decade before – preserved remarkably well in my otherwise patchy memory of childhood – played over in my mind: "Men who want to change their gender are just depressed and desperate idiots who think their life would be better if they were a woman." But as time went by I began to feel worse and worse.

I remember the moment that I first really recognised it: I was walking to school, crossing under a bridge, and I stopped. Nothing specific triggered it. It was like the moment a glass goes from being full to overflowing. I had to blink away tears and drag myself the rest of the way to school when all I really wanted to do was collapse on to the pavement.

I soon found myself on the internet looking for help. Maybe I could talk to someone who could fix me, who could stop me from turning into one of those "desperate idiots". But instead I found hundreds of trans-people who were

happy, beautiful, and friendly, and I realised that everything I had been told about trans-people was wrong.

It took me a year to tell my parents. I thought of a thousand ways to do it, but in the end I blurted it out to them at 9:30pm after shivering silently in the living room for 40 minutes trying to work up the courage. Then I immediately ran up to my room. After a few minutes they came up to talk to me, and after I explained it to them my mother burst into tears. I had to cuddle her and tell her it would be ok. My dad, on the other hand zoned out. He clearly didn't know how to deal with it so he just pretended it wasn't happening. And then my mum asked me to wait until my Grandmother died before I told anyone else.

"It won't be long," she told me, "It would just be so confusing and painful for her."

I couldn't respond.

She apologised the next morning, but now I can't stop thinking about it, and I can't stop hating her for saying it, for making me think of my Gran as an obstacle, for making a depraved and perverse part of me hopeful whenever she gets sick.

I envy the people who can enjoy spending time with their family; the people who are shocked when I tell them that I can't stand being around mine. I wish I could have the kind of loving and comforting relationships with my cousins and aunts and uncles that our culture presents as normal, but I can't be myself around them. If I were to give any indication of my real identity then they might turn on me. I can taste the falseness of every word I say to them, sour like vomit. When my family look at me they see me as the boy they have

known for 18 years, and I act that part for them because it's easier. It's terrifying just how easy it is to slip back into that role. And it's devastating how easy it is for my parents to slip back into treating me how they used to.

"Your Mum told me you got accepted to university. Why on earth didn't you call and tell me?" My Aunt says excitedly. I laugh and invent some excuse. I don't tell her that I didn't call because talking to my family makes me hate myself.

The main trouble is the uncertainty. I don't know how they feel. I don't know how they would react if I stopped pretending. They could disown me, it could cause a rift between them and my parents, or, perhaps worst of all, nothing could change, and they would continue to use the wrong names and the wrong words as if they didn't know. My friend tells me that his family was amazing and helpful and respectful when he told them he is a boy, but he is just lucky. I need a clue, I need them to bemoan marriage, or congratulate Trump, or complain about 'the queers'. I wish I could know for sure that they despise me. But conversation always stays in painfully safe territory.

Why couldn't I have been one of those people that always knew? One of those people that clearly displayed the signs from early childhood. One of those people that started treatment before puberty and who looks to the world entirely their correct gender. Instead I am stuck at 17 with only parents and friends knowing. Monstrously tall, face covered in stubble.

Whenever I read articles about a primary school child living as their correct gender a part of me hates them for it. No matter what I do to change my body and my future I will never be able to change the past. I will never have a

childhood I can look back on comfortably. I will always be haunted by my naively masculine childhood.

But when I do look back, I see more and more signs. I remember getting changed in bathrooms rather than open changing rooms; I remember looking forward to the days where there would be girls at my child-minder's because that meant the dollhouse would be brought out; I remember being secretly pleased to go clothes shopping with my Gran because it gave me an excuse to be in the women's section; I remember pissing myself in a library bathroom because all the cubicles were taken and I refused to use the urinals; I remember thinking that being a girl was inherently preferable to being a boy, and that all boys thought the same. But despite all of that, it took me 15 years to figure it out.

It makes you lose trust in yourself. How could I have thought I was a boy for so long? If I could miss such obvious signs then what else about myself might I be missing now?

But I also need to acknowledge that I'm tremendously lucky. I could have been born in my parents' generation with no hope of transition, and no future other than prostitution and a slow death from AIDS. Or I could have been born in a country where the threat of execution hung over my head. Or I could have been born to hateful parents who would have sent me to torture camps in the hopes of 'curing' me. But just because it could have been a lot worse doesn't mean I can't still resent that it's not better. Right?

"Are you wearing lipstick?!" My godmother laughs as if I had played the most preposterous prank.

"Is that nail polish?" my Gran asks. "Is this some new fad boys are doing?"

I don't say any of the things I want to say. Instead I sell myself out and go along with them.

"Yeah, I just wanted to try it out Gran."

"Ha ha, yeah, my friend made me put it on."

I am too used to it for them to notice the pain in my voice.

I told my mother about my friend who was really struggling with dysphoria over the holidays because his parents treat him like a girl and call him the wrong name.

"Oh, so does it bother you when we call you Oscar and use male pronouns?" my mother asked.

"Yes," I replied coldly.

"But you haven't told us to call you she or call you Heather."

"I didn't want to pressure you or make you uncomfortable," I replied aloud.

"You shouldn't need to be told! You should fucking know!" I screamed silently.

But I know that my parents try their best, and I know that it's difficult for them. Nobody told them that this was a possibility and they were unprepared for it. They are more accepting and tolerant than many other parents would be.

But it still isn't good enough. I can't bear overhearing my Dad talk about his son over the phone, I can't bear having to correct my new hairdresser because my mom booked me as Oscar; it isn't their fault but I can't bear their mistakes.

But despite all of this there is a certain comfort in knowing you are queer. For so long you feel wrong. You don't know who you are because you sure as hell don't fit who you are expected to be. But then you find a new place to fit in; you find identities you didn't know existed but

that fit you so perfectly. It's like taking in the first gulp of air after too long underwater. That's why I groan anytime I hear someone complaining about the prevalence and frivolity of the internet or social media; if it weren't for the internet I would never have found out that it was possible for me to be a girl. I would still be the depressed boy I was three years ago.

But in the real world everything changes. What comforted me when I was on the internet changes to a disfigurement, marking me as something different. There are people who are able to handle this with confidence, who can go out every day in makeup and skirts, but I am not one of them. There is a certain noble dignity in standing against people throwing stones, in being so hated that you are seen as a threat. But I am seen as a clown. There is no dignity in standing against bemused laughter, against people who see you as a joke.

I shudder at the thought that I could have been born at the same time as Marsha P Johnson or Sylvia Rivera. I could have been born at a time when it was illegal for people like me to exist. It was so close, so terrifyingly close. I am in the first generation of queer people that don't need to fear for their life. If I had been born just one generation back I would have been on the front lines. I like to think that if I had seen Stonewall on television or heard about it on the radio I would have packed my bags and gotten on the first flight to New York. I would have been there to throw a brick, or smash a car, or scream to the world that I was worth more than they thought that I was, not just some filth for them to scrape off the sole of their shoe and brush out of sight of polite society.

But more likely I wouldn't have gone. If I am insecure

and afraid now then how much worse would I have been if I were alive in the sixties? I would have hidden who I am to everyone, including myself, and pretended to see Stonewall as a violent riot of freaks like everyone else, and not the first burning glimpse of light at the end of the tunnel that it was. But it's even more likely that I would not even have lived long enough to see it. So I am glad I was born when I was, and I am grateful for the sacrifices that my predecessors made to allow me to live with a freedom and dignity they never saw. It gives me hope that the next generations will be able to live lives freer and more dignified than mine. They won't have to worry about coming out to their family or expressing themselves the way they want to. They won't have to feel how I have felt for so much of my life. So I think I will be able to weather the difficulties of the present, things will improve: I will tell my family, for better or worse; I will move out of home and be somewhere without constant misgendering; I will take hormones and have surgeries to make my body look more like I need it to; I will live. And maybe 50 years down the line a transgender child will look to me and know that trans people are not desperate and pathetic, and that we don't need fixed, and that the agony that they are going through will pass and that they will be able to be comfortable and happy in the future.

# EWERYST, POLAND

**Trans people are usually expected to ‘pass’, to portray themselves as convincingly male or female, according to the rules and expectations that society has for them. This is often enforced by the medical community, and it is often not appropriate for trans people and never appropriate for non-binary people. Eweryst writes here about trying to find an escape from these expectations, to be themself.**

There is a forest and meadows all around my home. On the north and east side the forest is old and diverse, all kinds of trees, bushes, moss and plants grow there. Then it is cut by a path leading to our house, and on the south part the forest is a new grown birch copse. Towards west it slowly becomes a garden, through the bushes of hazelnuts, than walnut trees, plums, apple trees into the open space with beds full of vegetables and herbs. Further on the west and back into north there is a meadow, wet at this time of the year, and a pond. Rarely any human being comes here, apart from the queer members of our community and friends.

I am not sure why queerness is such a city thing. When you think of queer spaces, what comes to your mind? Berlin? London? Amsterdam?



My queerness is forest based. I feel it flourishes here and I can be fully in my (trans)identity and my (trans)body when around trees, plants and animals. I feel my animal body when at home, so deeply. I do not need to care if I will pass as a boy in front of this huge oak. I pass as me. The wagtail on the branch does not seem to bother to figure out my gender. Such a relief!

I put my body into a shape every time I go to the city. A “male-shape”. I stop smiling, I pretend to be self-assured, I try to take up space, widening my shoulders, making myself seem bigger. All the things I’m so not used to doing. And it seems such a silly game when I think about it now. But it works. I get not to be misgendered that often. I still do, because of an earring or piercing in my nose or lack of facial hair. But putting a “male-shape” into my body works.

I do not want to do it.

But I do want to pass as a boy.

I do not want to pass as this kind of boy, who takes up space, pretends to be self assured and knowing everything.

But that is the only way I can often pass.

I find myself entangled in this binary trap of either or. I find myself playing this game, and sometimes it is subversive but sometime it just feels like reinforcing the system that my very existence puts into question. And I’m so often tired of playing, of being alert all the time, trying to figure out what gender a person in front of me assigns to me to be able to act accordingly, so that I don’t get in trouble.

I did get into trouble many times, because of not acting according to gender norms. The moment I am most stressed about it is when going to a clinic for transgender people. That

is the place I am trying to erase my queerness and transness as much as possible. That is what I am being expected to do. After all, they are treating me there, so I can be a healthy member of a society again. I once said to my doctor that I am attracted to all kinds of people, regardless of their gender. Wrong answer. I was struggling to get my prescription for hormones for a couple of months because of that.

The doctor was very pleased to know, when I told him that I have a girlfriend. It made him give me a paper for the court more easily. I was healed. That's another game I'm playing - trying to guess what answer to the doctor's question would be the most correct one, how would an average Polish male answer this question. There was a show on Polish TV called "Familiada", where the aim was to guess the most common, average answer to the question asked. I feel like I am on this show when at the doctor's. A Transgender Familiada, let us see how suitable are you for living in society!

So I am looking for the spaces that are free from this binary obsession, not to lose my mind. I find it among other queer people and in nature. The amazing diversity of the ecosystems I can see around me when in nature makes me feel like I belong. Makes me appreciate my own uniqueness among all the other unique creatures of this world. Both the silence and the variety of different sounds in the woods helps me to go out of the gendered language trap that I fall into every time I speak or think in my first language. I do not need to do anything more than simply exist to feel interconnected, rooted. I lie down in the grass and my body simply knows it is at home, I do not need to make an effort to become a part of this interdependent system of connections.

I just am. I breathe.

Mój dom otoczony jest przez łąki i lasy. Na północy i wschodzie las jest bardzo różnorodny – rośnie tam wiele rodzajów drzew, krzewów, mchów i innych roślin. Tę różnorodność przecina ścieżka wiodąca do naszego domu, a od południa las jest dopiero co wschodzącą brzezina. Dalej na zachód zmienia się ona płynnie w nasz przydomowy ogród, przechodząc najpierw w zagajnik orzechów laskowych, sad z orzechami włoskimi, śliwami i jabłonią, by otworzyć się na grządki pełne ziół i warzyw. Dalej na zachód i znów ku północnej części znajduje się łąka, podmokła o tej porze roku, i mały staw. Rzadko można spotkać tu człowieka, oprócz osób z naszej kłirowej społeczności i przyjaciół.

Kiedy myślisz o przestrzeniach kłirowych, co przychodzi ci do głowy? Berlin? Londyn? Amsterdam? Nie wiem, czemu kłir jest tak bardzo osadzony w miejskich realiach.

Mój kłir jest zakorzeniony w lesie. Czuję, że dopiero tu mogę rosnąć i być w pełni (trans)sobą i w pełni w swoim (trans)ciele. Dopiero tu, w domu, czuję zwierzęcość mojego ciała. Nie muszę się zastanawiać, czy przed tym wielkim dębem będę miał passing na chłopca czy nie. Mam passing na siebie. Pliszka na gałęzi wydaje się zupełnie nie zainteresowana moją płcią. Co za ulga!

Wkładam swoje ciało w kształt za każdym razem, kiedy jadę do miasta. "Męski kształt". Przestaję się uśmiechać, udaję, że jestem pewny siebie, próbuję zajmować więcej przestrzeni rozszerzając ramiona, sprawiając, że wyglądam na postawniejszego. Robię wszystkie te rzeczy, do których nie jestem przyzwyczajony. Wiem, jak głupia jest ta gra. Ale działa. Wszystkie te zabiegi sprawiają, że jestem trochę rzadziej tytułowany jako "pani". Nadal się to zdarza – bo mam kolczyk w uchu, w nosie, bo nie mam zarostu. Ale wkładanie siebie w

“męski kształt” pomaga.

Nie chcę tego robić.

Ale chcę, żeby czytano mnie jako chłopca.

Nie chcę tego robić. Ale chcę być czytany jako chłopiec, choć niekoniecznie taki, który wie wszystko, jest pewny siebie i bierze dużo przestrzeni. Niestety, często to jedyny sposób. Jestem uwikłany w binarny podział, jestem męski albo żeński.

Gram w tę grę, co czasem jest moją strategią subwersywną, a czasem jest po prostu wzmacnianiem systemu, który wymazuje moją tożsamość. Jestem zmęczony tym graniem, byciem czujnym na każdym kroku, zastanawianiem się, jaką płć przypisuje mi osoba, z którą rozmawiam, żeby móc zachować się odpowiednio do sytuacji. Bo inaczej będę miał kłopoty.

Już wiele razy miałem kłopoty z powodu nie odgrywania odpowiedniej roli płciowej. Najbardziej stresujące są te momenty, kiedy muszę iść do lekarza w przychodni zajmującej się osobami trans. Staram się wtedy ukryć mój klir i moją trans-tożsamość najlepiej, jak się da. Tego się ode mnie oczekuje. W końcu jestem tam leczony, tak, by móc stać się zdrowym członkiem społeczeństwa. Raz powiedziałem mojemu lekarzowi, że pociągają mnie różne osoby, niezależnie od ich płci. To była zła odpowiedź na pytanie o moją seksualność. Spowodowała, że czekałem na receptę na hormony o parę miesięcy dłużej. Lekarz bardzo się ucieszył, kiedy powiedziałem mu, że mam dziewczynę. To sprawiło, że z łżejszą ręką wydał mi zaświadczenie do sądu. Udało mu się mnie wyleczyć.

To kolejna gra, w którą gram – staram się zgadnąć prawidłową odpowiedź na pytanie lekarza. Prawidłową, czyli taką, jaką dałby przeciętny polski mężczyzna. Czuję się wtedy jak w Familiadzie. Trans-familiada, sprawdźmy jak dobrze poradzisz

sobie z życiem w społeczeństwie!

Szukam więc miejsc, w których nie panuje ta obsesja binarności. Znajduję je będąc wśród innych klirowych osób i w naturze. Niesamowita różnorodność ekosystemów, które mnie otaczają, kiedy jestem blisko natury, daje mi poczucie przynależności. Sprawia, że doceniam moją własną wyjątkowość pośród wszystkich innych wyjątkowych istot tej planety. Zarówno cisza, jak i cała gama różnych dźwięków rozlegających się w lesie pomagają mi wyjść poza językową pułapkę binarności płci, w którą wpadam za każdym razem, kiedy wypowiadam jakieś zdanie w moim pierwszym języku. Nie muszę robić nic ponad bycie obecnym, żeby czuć połączenie, zakorzenienie. Kładę się na miękkiej trawie, a moje ciało wie, że jest w domu, nie potrzebuję czynić nadmiernego wysiłku, żeby stać się częścią tego systemu połączeń. Po prostu jestem. Oddycham.

# CLAUDIO, PORTUGAL

**For some trans people it takes time to decide for themselves how they feel and who they are, and they can go through struggles with mental health or addiction in the process. Also, the political and social climate is only slowly becoming more accepting in places. In this piece Claudio talks about his life and the changing political situation in Portugal.**

I'm an FTM. Since I was a child, I've felt like an extraterrestrial, since I couldn't fit in the feminine roles that my family wanted to impose on me. That generated great anger and frustration, more than 40 years ago.

I'd cut my hair if my father didn't take me to the barber shop, and always have refused to wear any skirts or dresses... Played football with all the other boys and got into fights like any other regular kid.

In the 1970s, this was seen as very awkward behaviour by my family and friends (when they discovered I was born a girl), and my parents took me to a very well known child psychiatrist in my city, but I think that maybe he didn't have much awareness about transgenderism at the time. Since I've always loved to draw, and closed myself into the arts world as I grew up, probably my family and friends thought I was a bit

extravagant due to the arts preference and that would be an excuse for the masculine attire I wore all the time.

Adolescence presented me a lot of challenges as the dating and socializing activities become very important to my restricted friendship group. I reached youth with a heroin addiction, since I closed myself more and more to everyone because I didn't know how to deal with such issues, and homosexuality was something we couldn't even dream about without being completely marginalized or punished in all the possible ways by our social circle.

I also must say that before I became addicted, I made a suicide attempt that didn't succeed, so probably I'd unconsciously decided to kill myself with baby steps and no pain, as heroin does. At the time, that drug was being introduced in replacement for cannabis, in a dealers' manoeuvre to gain new customers (we went out to buy a joint and they told us they only have that "new" stuff).

I went to a rehab clinic where I met my future husband, and we supported each other during the recovery process, by being friends for almost one year before we started to date. He is 12 years older than me, and I think that his life experience and his protective attitude conquered me, when I thought I'd nothing to lose nor would I live much longer... and he was the only person I could ever have an intimate relationship with, since I've never felt in my true body and I still was a virgin at 22 years old.

We fought together to build our home and married two years after we met; our marriage is going on its 24th anniversary (we just made a pre-nuptial agreement never to have any kids).

I must say our life is pleasant and we make one hell of a

team, even if he always criticises my male clothes and way of acting... says I'm nuts in a caring way and we've lived happily and overcome lots of things in that long path.

However, this didn't make me stop to think about my dysphoria of not feeling "right" in my body, and when I reached my forties and the need for a life balance hit me, this started to be a daily presence in my head... questioning and questioning why I was this way, so much different from my brothers and sister, and if I'd ever find an answer to being a square peg that was always pushed to enter a triangular hole... always uncomfortable with myself... and then I sent my life story to a radio programme of a very well known psychiatrist. Never expected an answer, but it came. And I started therapy, and was introduced to transsexualism! I felt an immediate connection to the concept and after searching over Google for similar stories, a full recognition with so many! I wasn't alone nor I was an E.T.!

That gave me a big sense of comfort and the will to pursue myself, finally.

Even if I've a complete bond with my husband and explained him everything, he cannot cope with any surgeries... I'd be asking him too much, I know. So I have started a mild hormone therapy, with low T levels, to see how I feel and let him think slowly about the idea... that we could continue to be even more happy together if I could be finally happy with myself! Once again, I know I need baby steps on this too... And I'm praying that someday he can accept it; I'd not feel good even if I was embracing my true identity if I'd need to make him devastated by a separation he doesn't want or deserve, and would feel an egoistic person that only minds himself.



About my country, Portugal has changed a lot in the last decades. I was born before the Freedom revolution of the 25th of April of 1974 (the so called Carnations Revolution) that ended a dictatorship of almost 50 years.

In that time women had fewer civil and social rights and couldn't do anything outside their family house. We've gone a very long way and now I think Portugal is on the forefront of social rights and recognition of differences, after those dark years.

Since we've joined the EU the deal has been made to provide the infrastructures that we were missing and that allow a great economical development, and education has increased from 6 mandatory years to 12. We have private TV networks since the 1990s, satellite and cable access spread across the country. The church lost a lot of its big influence regarding families' lives about what was considered a "sin", like divorced couples or homosexuality (that change reached the new generations of priests too). The mentalities have opened and the winds of change have reached through the urban societies and are reaching the older generations and the remote villages that still exist in the interior of our country (we've a big problem with a lack of younger people in the interior regions).

Our parliament approved same sex marriage recognition, along with a very modern law for sex change procedures (even if not yet accompanied by the surgical procedures on the NHS, but we'll be getting there for sure).

Youth now enjoys full freedom and there's almost no discrimination (in the more cosmopolitan areas) regarding gender and sexual preferences.

Sou FTM. Desde criança que me sentia um “extra-terrestre”, pois nunca me consegui encaixar no papel feminino que a minha família me tentou impor. Isto gerou grande raiva e frustração, há mais de 40 anos.

Eu pegava numa tesoura e cortava o meu cabelo, se o meu pai não me levasse ao barbeiro, e sempre me recusei a vestir saias e vestidos...

Jogava futebol com os outros rapazes e andava à bulha como qualquer miúdo de então.

Nos anos 70, isto era visto como um comportamento estranho pela minha família e pelos meus amigos (quando descobriam que eu havia nascido rapariga), e os meus pais levaram-me a um pedopsiquiatra bem conhecido na minha cidade, mas eu penso que até mesmo ele não teria grande conhecimento acerca do transgenerismo na altura.

Uma vez que sempre adorei desenhar e me fui fechando no mundo artístico enquanto crescia, provavelmente a minha família e os meus amigos achavam que o meu comportamento “extravagante” se deveria às minhas preferências artísticas, e que isso seria uma “desculpa” para as roupas masculinas que usava sempre.

A adolescência trouxe-me imensos desafios pois a fase dos namoros e das actividades de socialização se tornaram muito importantes no meu restrito grupo de amigos. Cheguei à juventude com uma adicção à heroína, uma vez que me fui fechando cada vez mais a toda a gente; não sabia lidar com estes desafios e a homossexualidade era algo com que não podíamos sequer sonhar sem sermos completamente marginalizados e punidos de todos os modos possíveis e imagináveis no nosso círculo social.

Também posso acrescentar que antes da minha adicção, fiz uma tentativa de suicídio que não resultou, por isso, talvez a adicção tenha sido ela própria uma actividade “suicidária” em pequenas doses, sem dor, a que este vício nos compele.

Nos anos 80, esta droga estava a ser “introduzida” em substituição da cannabis, numa manobra dos traficantes para angariarem novos consumidores (nós tentávamos comprar um charro mas eles diziam-nos que apenas tinham esta “nova” droga).

Fui para uma clínica de reabilitação onde conheci o meu futuro marido, e ajudamo-nos mutuamente durante o longo processo, tendo sido amigos durante 1 ano, antes de termos começado a namorar. Ele tem mais 12 anos do que eu, e eu acho que a sua experiência de vida e o seu lado protector me conquistaram, quando eu achava que já nada tinha a perder e que não iria viver por muito mais tempo... e ele foi a única pessoa com quem consegui ter uma relação íntima, pois nunca me senti no meu verdadeiro corpo, sendo virgem aos 22 anos de idade.

Lutamos muito para construirmos a nossa casa e casamo-nos 2 anos após nos conhecermos; o nosso casamento vai no seu 23º aniversário (apenas fizemos uma acordo antenupcial: nunca ter filhos).

Tenho que dizer que a nossa vida é agradável e que fazemos uma óptima equipa, mesmo que ele me critique docemente pelas minha roupas masculinas e modo de estar... diz-me que não regulo bem da cabeça de um modo brincalhão e temos vivido felizes e conseguimos conquistar imensos desafios nesta já longa caminhada.

Contudo, isto não me impede de continuar a pensar

acerca da minha disforia, de nunca me sentir bem no meu corpo, e quando cheguei aos 40 e a necessidade de fazer um balanço de vida se impôs, esta questão começou a ser diária na minha mente... perguntando-me porque é que eu sou desta maneira, tão diferente dos meus irmãos, e se algum dia conseguiria saber a resposta do porquê de eu ser um quadrado que está sempre a ser forçado a entrar num espaço triangular... sempre em desconforto comigo... e enviei então a minha história de vida para o programa de rádio de um conhecido sexólogo.

Não esperava uma resposta, mas ela veio.

Então comecei a terapia, e aprendi o que era a transsexualidade! Senti um reconhecimento imediato e uma forte ligação ao conceito e após ter procurado no Google por mais histórias semelhantes, percebi que não estava só e não era um E.T.! Isto deu-me um grande conforto e vontade de finalmente me perseguir e tentar ser-me, algo que nunca achei ser possível anteriormente.

Apesar de eu ter uma ligação completa com o meu companheiro e lhe ter explicado tudo, ele não consegue concordar com quaisquer cirurgias... Bem sei que lhe estou a pedir demasiado.

Assim sendo, começarei em breve uma terapia hormonal “suave”, com níveis baixos de testosterona, para ver como me sinto e tentar que ele se habitue lentamente à ideia...

de que poderíamos ser ainda mais felizes juntos se eu finalmente pudesse ser feliz comigo!

Bem sei que isto terá de ser um processo vagaroso... e vou rezando para que um dia ele o possa aceitar; nunca me sentiria bem a abraçar a minha verdadeira identidade se para

isso tivesse de fazer uma ruptura numa relação longa e de suporte mútuo, uma separação que ele não quer nem merece. Sentir-me-ia uma pessoa egoísta que só pensa em si própria.

Acerca do meu país, Portugal, mudou imenso nas últimas décadas. Eu nasci antes da Revolução dos Cravos de 25 de Abril de 1974, que terminou com uma ditadura de quase 50 anos.

Nesse tempo, as mulheres eram objecto de repressão e de direitos sociais inferiores aos dos homens, e quase não podiam fazer nada fora de casa. Percorremos um longo caminho desde então, e penso que Portugal está na linha da frente do reconhecimento social igualitário e de aceitação das diferenças, após todos esses anos de escuridão e opressão.

Desde a nossa adesão à UE a aposta foi feita no desenvolvimento das infra-estruturas básicas que nos faltavam e que nos permitiram um grande desenvolvimento económico e social, e a educação obrigatória cresceu do 6 para os 12 anos de escolaridade.

Temos empresas privadas de televisão desde os anos 90, a tv por cabo e satélite espalharam-se pelo país. A igreja perdeu grande influência na vida das famílias e acerca do que era considerado “pecado”, tal como o divórcio ou a homossexualidade (e esta mudança também se reflecte nas novas gerações de padres).

As mentalidades “abriram-se” e os ventos de mudança de uma sociedade mais urbana estão a chegar às gerações mais velhas e aos locais mais recônditos (temos um grande problema com o envelhecimento da população e com a desertificação do interior do país).

O nosso parlamento aprovou o casamento entre pessoas

do mesmo sexo, bem como uma moderna lei de identidade de género (mesmo que o nosso serviço nacional de saúde não acompanhe a oferta dos procedimentos cirúrgicos para os transsexuais, mas haveremos de lá chegar).

A nossa juventude goza de uma enorme liberdade e já quase não existe discriminação (pelo menos nas áreas mais urbanas) quanto à identidade de género e das preferências sexuais.

# MINA, MALTA

**The process of realising and then coming to accept a trans or non-binary identity can be painful, especially for someone who has grown up in a conservative or religious background. Mina talks here about their colliding identities and their parallel journeys of self-acceptance and the changing social acceptance of queer and trans people in Malta.**

As I write this I identify as a baby-butch-gender-non-conforming-bear-cub, getting to grips with my Maltese-Sardinian [hair] roots and my short stature - fit for an islander built to live by the sea, crawling over garrigue landscape under the burning sun of long summers. A dark net is there to protect me from the sun. My intensely dark, wiry, black, thick hair emerges from follicles which cover almost every centimetre of my scalp, legs, toes, arm-pits, genitals, and that snail trail that creeps up to meet my sunken belly button.

Yet, some summers, I still burn.

*As Malta enters the European Union in May 2004, the Malta Gay Rights Movement (MGRM) picks up speed. It had been set up in secret, in bars and hide-outs in corners of Mosta three years earlier in 2001. With the promise of European values on the horizon, Maltese LGBT activists hold the first pride march down Republic Street in the capital city: Valletta.*

*Placards held high by the small group of activists shout “Love is Tender and Knows No Gender”, and “Diversity is our Strength”.*

Summer 2004, the slight sunburns on my young skin heal quickly, almost overnight. During a two-week family holiday in Montpellier, I wear my swimsuit constantly, as it flattens my peaking chest. We’re canoeing 14 kilometres down rivers, when blood comes knocking. I refuse to acknowledge it. I stuff my stained shorts at the bottom of the canoe. I jump into the water as often as possible, firmly believing that this will stop my bleeding. In the evening, we eat takeout pizza on a stranger’s porch. My clothes soaking from a long ride at the bottom of a canoe, I get to wear my dad’s t-shirt, and pull my cap low over my eyes. The stranger whose porch we occupy talks to my dad, who shows off his twin daughters. She exclaims “oh that’s so nice, to have one boy and one girl”.

*In 2008, the first research study about the inclusion of transgender people in employment in Malta is published, seven Maltese trans persons were interviewed.*

*“I was beaten up because they couldn’t accept it when I told them what I am”.*

Summer 2008, I stray from my own truth, to seek one that is not mine, the more I stray, the more I burn. And it hurts. It hurts so much. I identify as a charismatic Christian and I choose to escape from Malta, from home, and from my increasingly queer-er twin. I travel to Naples for one month, where I live in a convent of “The Order of The Missionaries of Charity” and organize daily sports and art activities for kids from the neighbourhood. One night, I lay in the chapel, trying to draw the pain out of me, scratching patterns into my skin, folding paper into swans, beating my head against



the floor, praying for my identities to align.

*MGRM organises Pride in July 2009; Dignity in Diversity, and my identities start to collide.*

Summer 2009, I escape the Maltese burns to find cooling sun elsewhere, but it's too late and my skin is starting to peel. My twin comes home one Saturday, wearing a rainbow bracelet. I look at it and know Lu has been to Pride. Lu refuses to come out to me, and I feel both jealousy and anger. I take a solo trip to London for my eighteenth birthday, I dawdle outside a bar in Soho for ages, before mustering the courage to walk in, and order a beer. I run out as soon as I finish it.

*The change in government after 25 years of stagnant, conservative, country leadership marks a new era for LGBTQI rights and the LGBTQI community in Malta. In 2013 the Government of Malta sets up a Consultative Council to discuss policies and laws for the community.*

Summer 2013, my Mediterranean complexion sparkles in the sun, not a tinge of red as my skin has learnt to protect itself. I pace nervously in my room practicing my speech for Malta Pride 2013. My third time at Malta pride, and there is so much I want to say and shout out to the world. But I call for better education. 'We should aim at eradicating homophobia and transphobia from the places which youth frequent, so that our future politicians, policy makers, doctors, educators, parents, can be more accepting, and more inclusive. So that one day we may live in a society in which one does not have to live with the same fears that many are surrounded by today.'

*In April 2015, the Maltese Parliament unanimously approve the Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sexual Characteristics Bill which provides quick and transparent legal gender recognition. Twenty activists gather outside Parliament to celebrate. We ask a passer-by to take a photo of us. Capturing this moment in history.*

Summer 2015, I am frail and suffering, my skin is cracking, I need to take care of myself. I take a long and lonely trip to recover from burnout. I sit in the corner of a community bar in Riga, minding my own business, sketching the lampshades. After a failed attempt at watching an Almodóvar film with badly-timed voiceover and no subtitles I return to my corner. A beautiful man from Potsdam sits there. He also tried to watch the movie. He is on a trip of his own. I start to tell him of the news I received today, I will be working for Transgender Europe, in Berlin from September. We share badly rolled cigarettes, stories of home, and midnight pasta.

We part ways.

I start to reconsider what I know about myself, the way my skin protects me as I get closer to my truth, the way it has peeled in the past, the way it changes hue, and I wonder what the next summers will reveal.

Jien u nħalli dawn il-memorji jinfirxxu mal-karta, jien nidentifika ruħi bħala baby-butch-gender-non-conforming-bear-cub; naċċetta l-għerq Malti-Sardinjan, il-forma żgħira pero ġusta għall-persuna li tgħix fuq ġzira imdawwra b'baħar, fejn mistennija timxi u titrembel fuq ix-xaġħri taħt xemx tiżreq fi sjuf twal. Hemm bħal bizzilla skura tipproteġieni mir-raġġi tant koroħ tax-xemx: ix-xaġħar u suf skur, iswed tuta, xott oħxon, jispunta mill-għerquq li jiksu kull parti tal-qargħa, ta' saqajja, tas-swagħba ta' saqajja, tal-ġenitali u dak il-pajsaġġ dejjaq li jixref biex jiltaqa ma' zokorti.

Pero f'ċertu sjuf, xorta waħda għadni ninħaraq:

*Hekk kif Malta tissieheb fl-Unjoni Ewropea fl-2004, il-  
'Malta Gay Rights Movement' (MGRM) qabad ritmitu;  
il-bidu tiegħu kien bejn l-erba hitan ta' ħwienet tax-xorb u,  
f'moħbiet fil-Mosta tlett snin qabel, fl-2001. Bil-għajta ta'  
valuri Ewropej fuq l-orizzonti, l-ewwel attivisti LGBT Maltin  
ingħaqquqdu flimkien u tellgħu l-ewwel 'Pride March' fi Triq ir-  
Repubblika, il-Belt Valletta. 'Placards' f'idejn grupp żgħir ta'  
attivisti f'għajta waħda 'L- imħabba hi tenera u ma tafl-ebda  
generu' u 'Id-Diversita hija il-qawwa tagħna.'*

Sajf 2004, ġildi żaġħżuġħa issa saret tfieq malajr mill-ħruq tax-xemx, kważi kważi f'lejla waħda. Matul il-ħmistax vaganza f'Montepellier mal-familja, kont il-ħin kollu noqgħod bil-malja għax kienet tiċċatjali sidri li kull ma imur kien qed jikber. Konna qegħdin inbaħħru b'kenuri erbatax-il kilometru l-bogħod mill-ixmara, meta d-demmm beda iċerċer. Nirreżisti milli nirrikonoxxih, deffist il-qalziet imtebbgħa fil-qieġ tal-kenur, u qgħadt naqbez il-baħar waħda f'waħda bil-fidi ferma li d-demmm ser jieqaf. Filgħaxija kielna pizza li xtrajna minn barra fuq l-għatba ta' waħda strangiera. Hwejjigi

kienu imxarrba mill-mohba li kienu fiha fil-qiegħ tal-kenur. Ilbist il-flok ta' missieri, u nizzilt il-beritta l-isfel, tghattili għajnejja. L-istrangiera li fuq l-għatba tagħha konna aħna mistrieħa harġet titkellem ma' missieri, il introduċa mkabbar lit-tewmin uliedu. Stagħġbet u qalet: "xi ġmiel li ikollok tifel u tifla".

*Fl-2008, tinħareġ l-ewwel ricerka dwar l-inklussivita ta' individwi transgender fil-qasam tax-xogħol f'Malta. Seba persuni trans Maltin ġew intervistati: "Jiena kont imsawwta għax ma ridux jaċċettaw dak li jien."*

Sajf 2008, naħrab mill-verita' biex nfittex waħda li ma hijiex tiegħi, aktar ma nitbiegħed, aktar ninħaraq. U twegġa, twegġa ħafna. Jien nidentifika ruħi bħala kristjana karizmatika u nagħzel li naħrab minn Malta, minn dari u minn tewmi li kull ma imur aktar kien/et qed t/jaġixxi ruħha bħala queer. Nitlaq lejn Napli fl-Italja għal xahar fejn ngħix ġewwa l-kunvent tal-'Ordni missjunarji tal-karita' fejn ta' kuljum organizzajt attivitajiet sportivi u artistici għat-tfal li kienu jgħixu fl-akwati tal-kunvent. Lejl minnhom, insib lili nnifsi fil-kappella, nipprova inwarrab minni dan il-kalċi li tant kont qed inħoss, nigref simboli fuq ġildi, nagħmel paguni bil-karti, inħabbat rasi mal-art waqt li nitlob biex l-identitatijiet tiegħi jillinjaw rwieħhom.

*l-MGRM torganizza il-Pride f' Lulju tal-2009; Din jita' fid-Diversita. L-identitatijiet tiegħi jibdeu jingħaqdu.*

Sajf 2009, naħrab mill-qilla tax-xemx Maltija u inffitex xemx aktar hanina, pero issa huwa tard wisq, il-ġilda ġa bdiet titqaxxar. Sibt minnhom, tewmi t/jiġi d-dar liebes/sa brazzulettta bl-ilwien tal-qawsalla ma idejh\_a. Inħares lej\_h\_a u ninduna li Lu kien\_et il-Pride. Lu t/jirriffjuta li t/joħroġ

‘out’ miegħi; ngħir u nirrabja. Niddeċiedi li għal-għeluq snini nitlaq waħdi għal vjaġġ Londra. Indum mhux hazin indur u naghqad barra bar f’Soho qabel ma nsib il-kuraġġ biex nidhol u nordna flixkun birra. Nixrobha u nitlaq nigri il-barra.

*Il-bidla fil-gvern wara 25 sena ta’ tmexxija stagnata u konservattiva tati bidu għal era ġdida għad-drittijiet LGBTQI u għall-kommunita’ LGBTQI ġewwa Malta. Fl-2013, il-Gvern Malti jobloq il-Kunsill Konsultattiv għal affarijiet LGBTQI biex fih tigi diskussa il-politika u l-ligijiet għal-kommunita’.*

Sajf 2013, id-dehra Mediterranja, tirrifletti fid-dawl tax-xemx, bl-ebda traċċa ta’ tbajja ħomor hekk kif issa ġildi tghallmet tipproteġi lilha nniffisha. Nippassiġġa f’kamarti sforz l-ansjetá, nipprattika d-diskors tiegħi għal Malta Pride 2013. Din issa kienet ser tkun it-tielet darba tiegħi f’ ‘Malta Pride’, u filwaqt li hemm ħafna li nixtieq ngħid u nxandar ma’ l-erbat irjeh tad-dinja nirrisolvi għal sejha għat-tejbien fl-edukazzjoni. “L-almu tagħna għandu ikun li neliminaw l-omofobija u t-transfobija mill-postijiet li ż-żgħażaġh tagħna jiffrekwentaw, biex hekk il-politici, dawk li jagħmlu l-politika, t-tobba, l-edukaturi, u l-ġenituri tal-futur ikunu aktar inklussivi u kapaci jaċċettaw lil dawk ta’ madwarhom. B’hekk xi darba għad ngħixu f’soċjeta’ fejn fiha wiehed ma ikollux jgħix fl-istess biża’ li qed ngħixu fiha aħna illum.”

*F’April 2015 il-Parlament Malti b’mod unanimu għadda l-att dwar l-identita’ tal-ġeneru, l- espressjoni tal-ġeneru u karatteristiċi tas-sess li jipprovdi rimedju legali trasparenti u effkaci għar-rikonoxximent tal-ġeneru ta’ l-individwu. Għoxrin attivista jiltaqgħu barra il- Parlament sabiex jiċcelebraw.*

*Tlabna persuna miexja fit-triq biex tgħdielna ritratt. Ridna li jkollna rikordju ta' dan il-mument fl-istorja.*

Sajf 2015, inħossni magħdura u mugugħa, ġildi maqsuma. Hemm bżonn li nieħu ħsieb tiegħi innifsi. Nitlaq waħdi għal vjaġġ twil biex nieħu saħhti lura. Inpogġi f'kantuniera ta' queer-bar ġewwa Riga nilhaq biss salibi u inħażżeż il-paralumi. Nersaq minn posti biex nipprova insegwi film tad-direttur Almodovar mingħajr sottotitoli u b' 'voiceover' barra mill-ħin. Nirritorna fil-kantuniera. Raġel sabiħ minn Potsdam issa qed hemm bilqegħda. Anke hu prova isegwi il-film. Qed fuq vjaġġ waħdu. Ngħidlu bl-aħbar li irċivejt illum, li minn Settembru, ser inkun naħdem ma 'Transgender Europe' ġewwa Berlin. Pejji pna sigaretti tat-trembil, qsamna flimkien l-istejjer tagħna, u f'nofs il-lejl platt għagin.

Hallejna lil xulxin.

Nibda inqis dak li naf fuqi innifsi s'issa, kif ġildi tipproteġini aktar ma nersaq lejn il-verita', kif tqaxxret fil-passat u kif tbiddel il-lewn tagħha, u naħseb fuq x'għad jizvelaw is-sjuf li imiss.

# SASHA, SERBIA

**The process of dysphoria, when we reject the expectations of how we are supposed to behave or dress, or even reject our own bodies, can be distressing or even debilitating. Sasha describes here three instances of how dysphoria has affected him and of struggling through it.**

I thought long and hard about what part of my trans experience I could share with the reader and there seemed to be nothing trans related in my life worth putting on paper. I had no significant incidents related to my “transness” that my brain deemed as worthy of being remembered.

Frankly, it was quite annoying to dig for memories through an already stressed mind, burdened with exams, upcoming surgeries, work, graduation papers and other mundane things. I thought that I should give up on this since I’m not good at writing a “dear diary” type of story anyway.

Well, apparently I changed my mind. However, I am not going to write the above mentioned type of story here (nor anywhere else), instead I decided to share some of my thoughts with you. These are thoughts that I had throughout different situations in my life and that I never attempted to analyze until now. They are about a little-big purple monster called dysphoria. Oops, the title already spoiled you.

## School rules and uniforms

“Elementary school students wear uniforms,” the teacher said.

To be honest, those things were hideous and I’m positive that most cis kids hated them too, but the nature of my problem was different from theirs.

At that time, at around the age of 7, I mostly refused to wear clothes that made me look like a girl and my mom would generally buy me things that I liked. Lucky me! Sadly, school regulations couldn’t care less about the possibility of some kid questioning the nature of his existence because of the uniforms.

I’d been made to wear feminine clothes before that, and almost every time I had tantrums about it. But this time, I realised that I would have to wear that thing almost every day, for years to come. It felt like being forced into a role that I just couldn’t accept.

It’s hard to describe the exact feeling when I saw myself in the mirror in the changing room of that shop. Now that I think about it, it’s creepy that a 7 year-old can feel like that.

Trapped would be a good word. Not trapped in my own body, no. But trapped in the image other people have about me and in the way they treat me just because of a certain body part.

I now realise that that moment was probably the first time the little-big purple monster surfaced, the first time I felt the touch of dysphoria.

“Where is your uniform?”

It’s stained. It’s being washed. I couldn’t find it. It makes my skin itch. I lost it. Insert another random lie here.



Actually, I had it on every time I left home in the morning, but I made sure to leave early enough so I'd have enough time to hide it in the basement of the building. I knew that everyone around me was making a mistake, but I didn't know yet how to prove it to them. However, I had no intention of feeling horrible every day, not if I could do something about it.

### **That time when your body goes haywire**

"At a certain age boys' and girls' bodies change. Boys' voices drop, they grow tall and develop muscle. Girls bleed. Don't get scared when it happens," mom said when I was around 9.

Nah. There was no way this could happen to me. I wasn't wrong. I was going to grow up a man and show them. I wasn't going to bleed.

"You will bleed." – the little big purple monster spoke with certainty from a comfortable space in the back of my mind.

"You're wrong." I wanted to believe that, but the voice of the purple thing still resulted in some sleepless nights and lots of anxiety for a few years to come.

And then it happened and it shattered the part of me that believed in a future that was never going to happen. I loved reading and watching animation before then too, but from that point, the world of fantasy became even more appealing. I gradually stopped playing sports, something I loved doing before, but which just didn't feel comfortable anymore. Anger was building up and metal music was medicine. Wearing black was an armour, leather, chains and military boots were a warning.

What I feared most was for others to see that I am suffering. I loathed the thought of being a victim, of being pitied. I preferred being the villain. I got into fights, I did blasphemous things to spite the religious who surrounded me, I bullied others, I hated.

“Even with all this misfortune, I am strong.” That’s what I liked to think.

Looking back now, that was actually the time of my life I was most fragile. But I am thankful for all that because I was able to find people who for various reasons felt the same. I found my friends in the dark and created bonds that will last a lifetime.

### **Is there anything on the horizon?**

My friends made things bearable, still, I was unhappy. As days went by, the purple guy kept feeding.

*“I’m always running in place.”*

*“No one can get very far with a deadweight.”*

*“There’s no point anyway.”*

Things weren’t changing and it literally felt like I was drowning. My future looked bleak.

*“Auguries of destruction be a lullaby for rebirth.”*

(Kajiura Yuki’s “Key of the Twilight”)

There wasn’t any real moment of epiphany or anything. I guess I just grew tired of living like that, without hope. A (self?) destructive phase can’t last forever so there had to be something I could do.

I had to accept life was never going to be perfect, but that didn’t mean it can’t be good. There were still things that brought me joy, still moments in which I could sincerely

smile. I tried thinking more seriously about the future and what I wanted from it.

I wanted to get an education. I wanted to transition. I wanted to be surrounded by people who share their joys and sorrows, and accept when I share mine. I wanted to create something for a change.

As it turned out, all of that was achievable.

Dysphoria does interfere when you think about what you want from your life and it does make a lot of things difficult, but what I discovered about myself is that fighting for my goals meant fighting dysphoria. Even now the purple thing didn't completely disappear, but looking back, it was significantly drowned by other voices of more cheerful colours.

I didn't yet reach the place where I want to be, but I keep myself busy and every year things become better than the last.

*“Consolations, be there  
In my dreamland to come  
The key to open the door is in your hand  
Now take me there”*  
(Kajiura Yuki's “Key of the Twilight”)

I hope you'll keep fighting. I know I will.

Dugo i duboko sam razmišljao o tome koji deo svog trans iskustva bih mogao podeliti sa čitaocima i izgledalo mi je kao da u mom životu nema ničeg vezanog za to što bi zaslužilo svoje mesto na papiru. Transrodnost mi nije priredila nikakav specifičan događaj koji bi moj um smatrao vrednim pamćenja.

Iskreno, bilo mi je mrsko kopati po sećanjima jednog već istresiranog uma, opterećenog ispitima, nadolazećim operacijama, poslom, diplomskim radom i ostalim ovozemaljskim glupostima. Pomislio sam da bih verovatno trebao da odustanem, ionako nisam dobar u *“dragi dnevniče”* pričicama.

Očigledno, predomislio sam se. Međutim, neću pisati dragom dnevniku (niti ovde niti igde drugde). Umesto toga, odlučio sam da podelim sa vama neka svoja razmišljanja. To su stvari koje su mi prolazile kroz glavu tokom raznih situacija u životu i koje se nikada nisam trudio da analiziram, do sada. Uglavnom se vrte oko Ljubičanstvenog Čudovišta koje se zove Disforija. Ups, naslov me je preduhitrio.

### Školska pravila i uniforme

“Osnovci nose uniforme.” Rekla je učiteljica.

Da budem iskren, ta odeća je bila toliko užasna da sam siguran da su je i mnogi cis klinци mrzeli. Priroda mog problema je, međutim, bila drugačija.

U to vreme, sa nekih sedam godina, uglavnom sam odbijao da nosim odeću u kojoj sam izgledao kao devojčica, te mi je mama kupovala stvari koje su mi se svidale. Blago meni! Nažalost, školski sistem nije bilo ni najmanje briga da li će neko od dece da dovede u pitanje celo svoje postojanje upravo zbog tih užasnih uniformi.

I pre toga su me terali da nosim žensku odeću, i gotovo uvek sam pravio scene, ali ovog puta... Ovog puta sam shvatio da ću tu *stvar* morati da nosim skoro svakog dana, još barem nekoliko godina. Osećao sam se kao da mi je nametnuta neka pogrešna uloga.

Teško je opisati tačan osećaj koji me je prožeo kada sam se prvi put video u ogledalu kabine za presvlačenje. Kad malo razmislim, jezivo je da se dete od sedam godina tako oseća.

*“Zarobljeno”* bi bila dobra reč za to. Ne zarobljen u svom telu, ne. Više kao da sam zarobljen u tuđoj percepciji mene. Zarobljen u tome kako me tretiraju i doživljavaju, zbog tela koje imam.

Sada shvatam da je to verovatno bio i prvi put da je Ljubičanstveno Čudovište isplivalo, prvi put sam tada osetio njegov dodir – dodir Disforije.

*“Gde ti je uniforma?”*

Flekava je. Na pranju je. Nisam je mogao naći. Izgubio sam je. *Svrbi me koža od nje*. Ubacite još neku nasumičnu laž ovde.

Zapravo, imao sam je ja na sebi svaki put kada bih izašao iz kuće. Samo sam izlazio dovoljno rano da sam imao vremena da je sakrijem u podrumu naše zgrade. Znao sam da svi oko mene greše, ali još uvek nisam znao kako to da im dokažem. Do tada, odlučio sam da neću da se osećam užasno svaki dan, ako išta mogu da uradim povodom toga.

### **Ono kada ti telo podivlja**

*“U određenim godinama tela devojčica i dečaka se menjaju. Dečacima se produbljuje glas, rastu brže i razvijaju im se mišići. Devojčice krvare. Nemoj se uplašiti kada se to desi.”* Mama mi je rekla kada sam imao devet godina.

Ma ne. Nema šanse da će se to meni desiti. Nisam *ja* bio u krivu. Odrast ću kao muškarac i pokazati im. Neću krvariti.

“*Krvarićeš*” – melodično je šapnulo Ljubičanstveno Čudovište, sa jezivom sigurnošću, negde iz udobne pozadine mog uma.

“*Grešiš!*” Želeo sam da verujem u to, ali glas Ljubičanstvenog me je idalje držao budnim noću i uredno hranio moju anksioznost još godinama.

Onda se *to* desilo, i srušilo onaj deo mene koji je verovao u nemoguću budućnost. Još i pre toga sam voleo da čitam knjige, stripove i gledam animirane filmove, ali od tog trenutka svet fantazije je postao privlačniji nego ikad. Postepeno mi je bilo sve neugodnije da se bavim sportom, pa sam ubrzo i prestao, iako sam nekada neizmerno uživao u tome. Taj višak energije sam preusmerio na bes koji je počeo da se nagomilava, a metal muzika je bila lek. Nosio sam crnu odeću kao oklop, a koža, lanci i vojničke čizme su bili neizgovoreno upozorenje.

Ono čega sam se najviše plašio jeste bilo da drugi ne primete moju patnju. Prezirao sam mogućnost da budem percipiran kao žrtva i da me sažaljevaju. Bolje sam se osećao u ulozi zlikovca. Tukao sam se, bogohulio u inat religioznima oko mene, maltretirao druge, *mrzeo*.

“*Čak i u svojoj nesreći, ja sam jak.*” Mislio sam.

Kada pogledam unazad, to je zapravo bio najfragilniji period mog života. Ali zahvalan sam na njemu, jer sam tokom tog perioda naišao na ljude, iz najrazličitijih razloga, meni slične. U mraku sam našao svoje prijatelje i stvorio veze koje će trajati celog života.

### Ima li nečega na horizontu?

Prijatelji su činili stvari podnošljivim, ali ipak nisam bio srećan. Kako su dani prolazili, Ljubičanstveni je dobijao na snazi, zdravo se hraneći negativnim mislima.

*“Konstantno trčim u mestu.”*

*“Niko ne može stići daleko noseći mrtav teret sa sobom.”*

*“Ionako nema poente.”*

Stvari se nisu menjale i bukvalno sam osećao kao da se davim. Budućnost mi je delovala sumorno.

*“Auguries of destruction be a lullaby for rebirth.”*

(“Key of the Twilight”, Kajiura Yuki)

Nije bilo nikakve epifanije ili nečeg sličnog. Pretpostavljam da mi je samo dosadilo da živim tako, bez nade. Ova (auto?)destruktivna faza nije mogla trajati zauvek, moralo je postojati makar nešto što sam mogao da uradim.

Morao sam prihvatiti da život nikada ne može biti savršen, ali to nije značilo da ne može biti dobar. I dalje su postojale stvari koje su me činile radosnim, trenuci u kojima sam se mogao iskreno nasmešiti. Pokušao sam ozbiljnije razmisliti o budućnosti i šta sam želeo od nje.

Želeo sam da se edukujem. Želeo sam da prođem tranziciju. Želeo sam da se okružim ljudima koji dele svoje sreće i tuge, i prihvataju kada ja delim svoje. Želeo sam nešto da *stvorim*, za promenu.

Ispostavilo se da je sve to dostižno.

Disforija ometa svako razmišljanje o tome šta želiš od svog života i otežava mnoge stvari, ali ono što sam tada otkrio o sebi jeste da je meni borba za moje ciljeve istovremeno značila i borbu protiv disforije. Čak i sada Ljubičanstveno stvorenje nije u potpunosti nestalo, ali kada bolje pogledam,

značajno je ugušeno drugim glasovima, veselijih boja.

Još uvek nisam tamo gde želim da budem, ali aktivan sam i svake godine stvari postaju bolje nego prethodne.

*“Consolations, be there  
In my dreamland to come  
The key to open the door is in your hand  
Now take me there”*  
(“Key of the Twilight”, Kajiura Yuki)

Nadam se da ćeš nastaviti da se boriš. Znam da ja hoću.



# VERA, NIGERIA

**Even in the gay community, in different countries, life can be difficult for trans people because they are expected to behave according to gendered standards. Vera describes how life has been for her in Nigeria, wanting to be a girl.**

“Charles! Charles!!” mum called.

“Yes mum, but I’m Vera not Charles,” I protested.

“Shut up you boy you ain’t no girl,” she sighed and banged the door.

I became sad but I know how I feel, even though mum did not understand. They can’t feel my identity, that’s why they never cared to buy me Barbie dolls.

My name is Charles Austine, but I’m known as Vera, based in Nigeria. I’m a trans woman, and I am a trained physiotherapist, fashionista and human rights activist.

This is a brief story of how I came to discover who I am and how I feel about myself.

Before you start reading my story nodding your head or feeling irritated towards my experience as a transgender person, know that diversity is real. People don’t change to what the society wants, rather to what they feel themselves unless you take a rope and hang your neck to suicide. Feel free

to be who you are no matter what they say. You are the only one who can make yourself happy.

When I was young, I expressed myself like a girl. Playing with Barbie dolls, swinging skipping ropes and dressing in my sister's clothes. Until I was seven I was in a questioning phase of my life, trying to judge my gender identity with spirituality. Even in high school, I was more comfortable sitting and talking with girls about boys and their boyfriends, recommending their makeups and discussing their inner menses. I locked myself in many times just to make myself happy by applying makeup and beautifying my face.

Coming from a very Christian background we were restricted to many rules that are mainly the Do's and Don'ts according to the Bible. It's hard living because I have always thought of myself as gay. I am a man, they say, and I'm attracted to men. I don't like that word gay. But I am not homosexual because I'm a woman trapped in man's appearance.

People laughed their silly heads and called me naughty, who made you a girl? I was beaten, abused, even raped. Yet I know how I feel - like a woman, not as a man. All this experience of brutality made me hide under the umbrella of the gay community just to take part in most of their health and psychological intervention. I thought no other person felt the same way I felt. Well, it's not true.

Even within the gay community, I met many transgender people like me. Most times our basic needs are not attended to because of our effeminate expression or identity. Even the gay community rejected me because of my effeminate nature. Still, that's me, that I can't change. I should be of course

addressed by my trans name not by my damn gender name which changes me to something that I'm not.

In my early twenties I went through another phase trying to match my physical look to my inner self. I even took some drugs. I always think of transitioning. It's the best way to make my society accept me of who I am as a girl. But the funds for that are a burden.

I struggled to combat my true identity after I found out that it's not possible to change who you are. Then I decided to accept what I can't change. And that's my inner feelings of my true self. Now I have identified my identity being transgender. I am comfortable with myself, and I love it.

Many people may try to change themselves but they end up causing more harm to themselves. Accept yourself and who you are. Gender is not what society determines but gender itself is who you feel you are inside and sex is just on the outside. Being a transgender person is not what you have been told to be. It's what you are and feel deep inside of you.

# ALEC, SWEDEN

**Loneliness and isolation are a price that a lot of trans people pay for coming out as themselves, and rejection by society makes it hard to make a living. Many trans people find themselves having to fend for themselves. Alec writes here about making his own life and livelihood in the arts.**

My name is Alec and I am Swedish. I am male, FTM to be exact, and I came out in 2012. Despite not coming out until I was 19 years old, I have been sure of my identity all my life. While the coming out part was very mind boggling and to be fair, quite frightening, since you never know what will happen or how people will react, it was the years that followed that threatened the survival of my being. I found out the hard way the difference between what people say and how they feel. When you come out, people may say that they are supportive. They may say that but that may not be the truth and I found that in most cases, that wasn't the truth. Not for the people around me. The people who had previously been my very close friends wouldn't even speak to me anymore. Even when it came to family, the change was apparent. Nothing was the same anymore. I remained close with some but many of the relationships I had with members

of my family were forever altered. We were no longer close and thinking back, I've come to wonder if we ever were or if the "closeness" we portrayed was as "real" as my façade prior to me coming out. Today it is better than back then, but there is still a gap between us that cannot be filled.

Many transgender people do not stay in touch with their families after coming out. Some are disowned, some become homeless or are bullied by their families until they have no choice but to leave. Even for the ones who do stay in touch with their families, such as myself, it will never be what it once was. When you have lived most of your life with these birth shackles, never being able to be yourself, to smile from the heart, to take a full breath without feeling your heart breaking, you will do anything to be free, for the pain to end. For some transgender people, most unfortunately, that means letting life end and for others it means throwing away the past and starting anew.

Looking back on those 19 years in chains, as far back as I can remember, when I was in constant pain, a pain that drowned me but that no one else saw, I am unable to look back with a smile, even though there were many things that would have made lovely memories, if my situation had been different. For 19 years, I wasn't there. Seeing photos, hearing stories – I have no clue who that person was, and I know why. I had always been on autopilot. My heart and soul was not there; it was merely my body that had been walking around, mirroring its surroundings.

I know many transgender people who feel this way, which is why it is hard on both them and their families. Their families cherish the memories of the time before, and

look for that person in them. They're sad that they lost that person, and somehow, they hope that they can still reminisce with you today, about all that happened before. Often when that happens they may revert to referring to another name, and when they come to you with their love for that other person, wanting to see them in you, wanting to reminisce and mentioning the other name, it feels like you've just received the kiss of death. Like all the joy and happiness in the world had disappeared and left only an overpowering freezing feeling of emptiness and despair.

That is the main reason why things may never be the same in a family after one member has come out as transgender, even if they do stick together and support each other. Another reason can be that people aren't educated enough. They don't know enough about transgender people or about gender and so they (cis-people) often make mistakes and say hurtful things that could have been avoided had they been more informed.

The first few years after coming out were a very lonely time and suffice to say, I lost a lot of people, but I do not regret it for had I not come out, I would have lost myself. When I decided to come out I did so because I had reached the turning point where my life would either need to change dramatically or it would come to a swift and early end. I am glad I chose change over the end.

Since 2012 my relationship with gender has changed quite a bit. I don't assume how people define themselves gender wise simply by looking at them, or hearing them speak for that matter, since I know first-hand that things are not always what they seem. As someone who has been mistaken

for the opposite gender a lot while I was transitioning, I know far too well how annoying and hurtful it can be when people assume they know who you are and what you feel simply by looking at you. It is not possible to know what goes on in someone else's mind and so without getting to know the person, there is no way of knowing who they are. Even then, we know only what they allow us to see.

I learned about how many norms and unspoken rules there are when it comes to either being male or female in society and everything I was encouraged to do when I lived my life with the female façade, I was discouraged to do when the world around me had learned I was male. I came to disdain all the "rules" and as someone who hates being told what to do, I found it even more bothersome when I was given advice I had not asked for regarding how to be a man, what to like, how to act and how to dress. As an artist and writer, I had no intention of hiding my true self, of sticking to the norm and the stereotypical male gender role. Everyone tried to tell me what to do but I said to myself "Screw it!" and I took a brisk walk in the opposite direction.

When I was 22 years old, I moved to an island to start a self-sufficient life. Now as I near 25, I am planning to acquire an off-grid home that will run itself, with its own water and power system, combined with an all year-round food garden. That will enable me never to pay for rent, water or electricity again, and it will enable me to travel - a life outside of the system, as much as one can be.

I've never been keen to follow norms and so I am a certified makeup artist, fashion stylist, hair stylist and I've studied acting, dancing – anything from ballet to street. I love creativity and I love the arts. Due to all my experiences with

gender, transphobia, society's nonsense and the roles we are told to play in this world, I wanted to start something artistic and slow-fashion related that could be like a safe haven – soul food – to people who do not conform to society, who want to be themselves, whoever they are, dress the way they please and love the arts without being told not to. That is when Desolate Path, previously Fashion Androgyny, was born, first as a fashion blog and then through the years it has become a digital magazine and it is becoming more and more of a business each day. You can find it at [desolatepath.com](http://desolatepath.com). I hope to be able to work with it full-time soon and I am looking for sponsors and saving money to that end. It is very exciting and I've been getting a lot of promising feedback thus far.

Since high school I have dreamt of starting my own fashion brand, one that is full of soul, colours and creativity but has a joined size system and is without gender. It is simply soul fashion. That dream will someday soon become a reality as I created the first collection of pieces in summer 2017 and photos of them were featured in the AW17 issue. The brand is named Soul Peace and will hopefully have its own online shop this year, 2018. It will be eco-friendly, sustainable, ethical, vegan and mostly handmade. I'm looking into how I can go as minimal as possible with packaging waste as well, with biodegradable packages and linen bags. It is a journey and it takes time, but I am loving every moment of it. It will not be a mass-produced brand. I'm happy to keep it small and artistic.

It has now been nearly six years since I came out. I ignored all the haters, everyone who told me no, and I designed my own life. I found myself and what makes me happy, I built my own family with true and honest friends and as hard as it is and has been, my life is finally starting to feel like my own.



For the first time, I feel hope for the future, despite the hate-filled and often corrupt world we live in. I no longer have the same need to escape, albeit I have remained an avid reader. I have many more interests now and I have finally found the joy of life and because of that I have found my way back to past interests. Interests I thought I'd never find my way back to.

Most people around me do not know of my history, or rather, I haven't gone right out and said it. When it comes to society here, being trans can, and often is, a pain in the ass due to ignorance. Discrimination and mental abuse is common when being in contact with hospitals and certain authorities and the so-called health care for transgender people here in Sweden is abysmal. I had to be in contact with a certain clinic for a gender investigation to get a diagnosis as transgender and the right to receive hormones and surgeries, but visiting that clinic was hell on earth. I went through it for as long as I had to but it nearly destroyed me, as it did to just everyone who went there. They didn't know much about transgender people and they made it very clear that they thought we were less human than them, and less deserving of being treated well and of finding happiness. In the end I got the diagnosis, I got approved for the hormone treatment and the top-surgery and eventually I could apply for the legal change. Due to transphobia and a certain inexcusable note by one of the doctors, my application was wrongfully declined. With help from the LGBT organisation here in Sweden and their lawyer, I appealed the decision and had to appear in court and fight for my right to be myself and be legally male, as I should have been from birth. It took a long time but last year we won!

In a few years or so I do believe trans people in Sweden

will be able to change their legal gender and ask for hormones or surgery by simply applying for it themselves, without a diagnosis or a gender investigation. Thankfully the world is changing and not a moment too soon. At last it is also possible to enter male ID numbers when visiting midwives and the like. Until now, all the pregnant trans men had to carry around paper journals to each visit. So far only one clinic has caught up to calling the prenatal care with a gender-neutral name or “father care” but hopefully more clinics and hospitals will soon catch up.

There is still a lot of transphobia around, and finding a hospital or even a doctor that won't treat you poorly can be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Many of us, myself included, avoid going to the hospital as a result. Most things that other people take for granted such as going to the hospital, shopping for clothes, going to the bathroom, going to the gym, applying for work, can and are often very problematic for transgender people. While the world is becoming more openminded, transphobia, homophobia, racism – all the forms of hatred against minorities – still thrive. Isn't it ironic? In the age of information, ignorance still plagues most parts of the world. I long for the day when it isn't so. People who aren't in any type of minority group or people who are too brainwashed to realise how far they are controlled by society, won't ever know what it's like when people look at you and treat you as if you have absolutely no value, as if they'd dance on your grave. But that is the reality and something I dare say most transgender people will experience at some point. You get used to it, but it never stops being painful. All the time transgender people get told by cis-people that transphobia is an illusion, that it is

something we have invented in our minds because we crave attention. That is another example of how far the ignorance epidemic, that is upon us, has gone.

The only advice I have for whoever took the time to read this is, step away from society's idiocy, look for peace and happiness, do whatever the heck makes you happy and live your life as yourself, on your terms, without paying mind to the haters, to the ignorant and to the people who are placing their own fears and insecurities on to you. Life is short; it passes in the blink of an eye. Make sure that you truly live so that when your life is over, you do not have anything to regret, anything left undone, and are able to take on the new adventure that is upon you with a smile. Benjamin Franklin said, "Many people die at 25 and aren't buried until 75". Don't let that be you.

Mitt namn är Alec och jag kommer ifrån Sverige. Jag är en man, trans, och det här är min historia. Jag kom ut när jag var 19 år gammal, år 2012, och det var en skrämmande, känslösam och fantastisk upplevelse. Många sa att de stöttade mig men ljög då både för mig och för sig själva. Jag förlorade de flesta av mina vänner och familjerelationerna var för evigt förändrade. Jag har fått uppleva diskriminering, hat, psykisk misshandel och kan bekräfta att transfobi finns överallt i samhället. Jag har blivit illa behandlad av skolor under min utbildning, sjukhus närhelst jag behöver besöka ett, och myndigheter generellt. Man blir förvånad, inte när man blir illa behandlad, utan vid de oerhört få tillfällen som man inte blir det. Som följd av det undviker jag sjukhus och kontakt med myndigheter generellt. Även att resa blir ofta bekymmersamt. Jag har många gånger blivit hånad och felkönad medvetet trots att jag är man och har ett manligt id. Jag har fått uppleva transfobi så det står härliga till då man försökt boka resor, och trots att jag älskar att resa så får jag alltid en klump i magen innan, för man känner så tydligt att vad som helst kan hända.

Innan jag kom ut gick jag på autopilot och min själ var inte där. Därför kommer jag knappt ihåg tiden innan jag kom ut. Jag var ju inte där. Jag var mycket ensam sedan jag föddes eftersom att jag visste vem jag var, men ingen annan såg det, och ingen förstod mig. Jag kände mig inte hemma någonstans. Efter jag kom ut var jag fortfarande ensam, men nu kan jag i alla fall känna mig hemma i mig själv. Jag har insett att jag blir hellre hatad för den jag är, än att som innan jag kom ut, känna att folk endast gillar mig för att jag går på autopilot och endast speglar min omgivning. Än idag finns

det människor som tittar på mig och försöker se den jag var då, när jag inte var där. Men den personen de letar efter i mig existerade aldrig. Den personen var en illusion, en spegel av tomhet som endast speglade tillbaka sin omgivning. På grund av det blev många familjerelationer aldrig desamma efter jag kom ut och började leva.

Min relation till kön och könsidentiteter har ändrats mycket sen jag kom ut. Jag antar inte hur någon identifierar sig bara genom att titta på dem och när ett barn i min närhet föds så ser jag inte barnets könsorgan som någon som helst indikation till vem barnet är eller kommer att bli som person. När jag själv får barn en dag kommer jag att behandla dem på samma sätt oavsett vilket organ de visar sig ha, och jag kommer troligtvis att uppfostra dem väldigt könsneutralt så att de får experimentera med sin identitet så mycket de vill och behöver.

Jag har ingenting för könsroller och jag anser att det mesta gällande kön är samhällets uppfinning. Jag själv identifierar mig som man men det har ingenting att göra med mina intressen, hur jag klär mig eller något sådant stereotypiskt. Jag ser mig själv som en androgyn man och jag lever som jag vill, klär mig som jag vill och jag har absolut inget intresse av att hålla mig till stereotyperna bara för att passa in. I en värld där alla står ut så innebär en önskan att passa in och vara "normal" samma sak som att sluta leva och sluta att vara sig själv. Det är inte hälsosamt.

Istället för att ändra på mig själv så skapade jag mig mitt eget liv med självständigt leverne, utbildning till stylist och makeup artist med mera, arbete som frilansande skribent, översättare och subtitler och med alla mina samlade erfarenheter skapade jag den första okonventionella tidningen utan inriktning

på kön – Fashion Androgyny. Den började som en blogg, växte till en modetidning och har sen dess gått igenom ännu en förändring med namnbyte och den har antagit en än mer självständig, eko och hållbar inriktning. Den guidar numera inte bara sina läsare till hur de hittar modet att vara sig själva, utan också hur de skapar de självständiga liv de drömmer om, okonventionella hållbara liv, ofta utanför samhället, där de kan leva i frihet, såsom vi alla alltid borde fått göra från början.

Desolate Path's mål är att vara soul-food för alla de som älskar mode, natur och att experimentera med sin stil och som vill vara fria att uttrycka sin identitet precis som de vill, utan gränser, och som drömmer om en värld med jämlikhet, utan homofobi och rasism, där alla får vara som de är och älska varandra fritt. Tidningen skriver om hbtqia, samhällets normer och regler, slow fashion, veganskt mode, hållbarhet och intervjuar nyskapande okonventionella individer och märken om deras syn på mode, samhället, hållbarhet, livet och normer. Jag håller även på att starta ett eget klädesmärke med slow fashion med ett storlekssystem där kön aldrig kommer in i bilden. De första plaggen visades i 2017's höstnummer av Fashion Androgyny, numera Desolate Path, och förhoppningsvis finns det möjlighet att starta online butiken i år, 2018.

Det är nu fem år sen jag kom ut och oerhört mycket har hänt sedan dess. Det var en lång resa till att få mitt manliga personnummer på grund av problem med den så kallade "transvården" här i Sverige och transfobin som präglar den. Det har varit anmälningar och rättegångar – ja, en lång process som enbart gick ut på att jag skulle övertala och motivera varför jag skulle ha rätt att leva som mig själv och i rättegången fick jag övertala ett gäng random personer

– en jury - om att jag var jag, och de fick sedan rätten att besluta om min framtid. Om jag skulle få ha någon framtid överhuvudtaget. Tillslut fick jag mitt riktiga personnummer och id, men det har sedan dess blivit mycket administrativa problem, problem med vården och journaler, och jag har fått uppleva mycket transfobi riktat mot mig just för att jag har bytt juridiskt kön. Det har fått mig att verkligen än mer avsky att alla barn tvingas på ett kön vid födseln, utan att ha någon form av vetskap om vilka barnen är på insidan. Om jag väljer att bli gravid kommer jag att behöva tänka noga på var jag ska söka vård, vart jag ska bo för att ingenting ska hända mig eller barnet på grund av transfobi och diskriminering. Var är det säkrast? Kommer jag att få hyra bostad eller kommer jag att bli vräkt? Kommer jag att få behålla mitt jobb? Det är sådant man som transperson måste tänka på och det är fruktansvärt orättvist. Man känner sig aldrig säker.

Jag kommer aldrig att ångra att jag kom ut men jag kommer aldrig att stödja samhället såsom det ser ut idag med könsroller, rasism, korruption, homofobi, transfobi, lägre löner för kvinnor, sjuka kroppsideal och allt annat osunt som är "normalt" inom samhället. Jag kommer alltid att fortsätta jobba för en värld där människor inte tvingas in lådor, där man inte uppmanas att kväva sin själ och kreativitet utan uppmanas att älska, vara sig själv och vara lycklig.

Mitt råd till alla människor som läser detta är att se till att göra det som gör er lyckliga. Alltför många existerar utan att leva och det är så onödigt. Lev som dig själv, gör det du älskar, res dit du vill och se världen och älska de du älskar av hela ditt hjärta. Begränsa dig aldrig. Benjamin Franklin sa, "Many people die at 25 and aren't buried until 75". Låt inte det vara du.

# ANNU, FINLAND

**Not everyone is binary, male or female; gender is increasingly being recognised as a spectrum and some people exist somewhere between male or female, or don't feel that they are gendered at all. Annu writes here about how for them, gender is a mask that they put on.**

Until my thirties, I remained partly invisible to myself and to others. I was first a girl and then a woman, because that's what I was told. Then I heard of non-binary identities, and something that, until then, had been obscure and formless, became visible and attained a shape. I was already 33.

My journey from “cis woman” to agender has not been a well-defined and linear chain of events, but rather a 1000-piece puzzle that has gained more pieces over the years in a random order.

One whole in this puzzle is my physical appearance, and how I present or don't present gender externally.

I've been told that when I was little, people often mistook me for a boy because of my short hair. I don't remember being particularly bothered by this. As a teenager and young adult, I sometimes felt like I wasn't a proper girl or woman. My breasts never grew very much, and I suppose my facial features are somewhat androgynous. I have a slender and wiry, not a “soft and feminine” build. However, I have quite



a slim waist and wide hips, so I view my body as a kind of indeterminate mix of both feminine and masculine features. In photographs, my androgyny is often more apparent. For example, a new acquaintance told me that he had looked at two photos of me, and in one, he had seen a beautiful woman, and in the other, a handsome man.

My hormone production may be a factor in how I experience my gender. Nevertheless, I perceive my androgynous appearance to be mostly a lucky coincidence – it’s convenient for me personally that I don’t have to think about things like chest binding. However, not all trans or non-binary people share this experience, and most importantly, not every non-binary person wants to appear genderless. I can’t emphasize this enough; gender is about so much more than biology or what can be seen by others.

I’ve always been able to dress femininely and wear make-up with reasonable credibility, but it has also felt more or less like wearing a costume. In all likelihood, I could have dressed in a masculine way just as well, but the option didn’t occur to me until I started consciously questioning my gender. Nowadays, I mostly dress fairly “neutrally”, to the extent that that’s even possible. I rarely wear skirts or dresses, but also my most clearly masculine garments tend to stay in the closet, to be worn on special occasions.

My hair started to gradually get shorter approximately ten years ago. For a long time, I hesitated to get a really short haircut. I was worried I would “look like a boy”. In hindsight, I believe that on some level I knew the hair question wasn’t only about the aesthetic aspects. I became short-haired three years ago, and the thought of having long hair again feels pretty much impossible.

My inner experience, too, has from time to time carried reflections of a vague feeling of not quite belonging to the gender I was assigned at birth.

I studied a technical, male-dominated field at a university. There's an association for women that study at the university, and they organise for example an event called 'Girls' sitsit', a dining, singing and drinking party where the only males allowed are the waiters and possibly some performers. I remember finding the premise of the party somewhat strange. I didn't really understand why I was supposed to want to exclude some people from a party based solely on an arbitrary criterion such as gender.

The other programme organised by the women's association at that time relied quite heavily on stereotypes about 'girls' things'. It felt so alien to me that I couldn't bring myself to participate in a single event, even though on some level I of course understood the need for such an association, and would have wanted to support their activities.

Despite all that, I was still inhabiting the 'woman' box when I had my children. During that phase, not knowing about the alternatives might actually have made my life easier. I didn't have to experience anxiety over the vocabulary that erases gender diversity in health care. The pregnancies made my body look fuller, rounder, more feminine. I believe that also made it easier for me at the time to play the 'woman' part. It was fun wearing clothes that would otherwise look weird on me; it was, indeed, a kind of roleplay.

I was already over 30 when I found the crucial piece for my puzzle, by obtaining words for my vague experiences of 'wrongness'. Through social media, I gained knowledge of such terms as genderfluid, non-binary, genderqueer, agender

and so on. I explored those words and read the stories of non-binary and gender-nonconforming people. I tried the new terms on like exciting, novel clothes. I felt a strong sense of relief when I was no longer forced to be a woman.

A couple of years of soul-searching have since led to a fairly stable state. If I had to pick a term to describe myself now, my choice would be 'agender'. Even if, in some situations, I act in a way that's defined as 'womanly' in our society, I never feel like I'm manifesting some mystical feminine energy. I'm just being myself, while perhaps manifesting things I've adopted through socialisation or conscious learning. If I dress, for instance, in a clearly masculine way, I'm of course aware of how the people I meet might interpret my appearance, but I still don't feel 'manly' on the inside. If I change my body language according to how I dress, I'm very conscious of that, so it's still a play to me, not 'me channelling my masculine energy'.

I simply have no idea at all what it feels like to experience gender, so it feels logical to classify myself as genderless, or agender.

It might be tempting to think that once a person finds their own identity – a box that feels cosy enough, or a nice spot outside of all boxes – everything is smooth sailing from there on. I've come to find out, however, that unfortunately this isn't completely true, at least in the case of gender identity. Our society and culture still fail to properly recognise the existence of gender minorities. When one constantly bumps into the binary expectation, it's difficult not to question one's own identity in the same way the outside world does.

I've asked myself, among other things, whether I'm

simply so traumatised that I can't experience my own (binary) gender. I've also thought that maybe this is just a phase. Textbook transphobia.

But: does it really matter if my experience of gender (or lack thereof) is rooted in some kind of trauma? So what if this just a 'phase' or if my identity takes on some different nuances later? None of that makes my identity less real for me, now.

Right now, I feel better if I'm not labelled as woman. I'm delighted every time a form does not make me choose between two gender options, and more alternatives, such as 'other/I don't want to say' are offered as well. I also appreciate it when someone refers to me as they instead of she when speaking English, even if it may feel clumsy compared to the neutral pronoun *hän* we have in the Finnish language.

I'm satisfied and happy in my own skin. My internal and external worlds are increasingly in harmony. Discord basically only happens when someone tries to apply a category to me that I don't feel fits. Even at its mildest, it's frustrating, and it makes me feel invisible.

I often think about how the gender categories harm cisgender people pretty much the same way they harm trans people, because no one can truly ever fit the definitions of 'proper women and men' completely. So many people feel forced to act out of a definition that was imposed on them, rather than being true to themselves. It's hard to understand why, regardless of this, people want to remain stuck in these narrow frames as if their life depended on it. I've experienced repeated misgendering even from people that know me well and with whom I've talked about my identity.

It seems that there is something particularly difficult about this issue. Maybe it comes too close, forces us to question some fundamental things that we've come to take as a given, and thus makes the world feel even more complicated, and less familiar and safe? I'm not really sure, but sometimes the battle feels hopeless.

I'd like everyone clinging to the binary gender system to hear this message: I exist, and my identity is real and important, but I don't want to deny you the right to your identity. I only want that you, too, accept me for who I am, even if it means that you have to readjust your worldviews a little. Because I exist.

Elin kolmekymppiseksi asti osittain näkymättömänä niin itselleni kuin muille. Olin ensin tyttö ja sen jälkeen nainen, koska niin minulle kerrottiin. Sitten kuulin muunsukupuolisuudesta, ja jokin hahmoton mutta luultavasti aina olemassa ollut tuli näkyväksi ja sai muodon. Olin silloin jo 33-vuotias.

Matkani “cis-naisesta” sukupuolettomaksi ei ole ollut mikään selkeän lineaarinen tapahtumaketju, vaan tuhannen palan palapeli, johon on satunnaisessa järjestyksessä tullut lisää paloja vuosien varrella.

Eräs kokonaisuus tässä palapelissä on fyysinen olemukseni ja se, miten ilmennän tai olen ilmentämättä sukupuolta ulkoisesti.

Pienenä minua luultiin kuulemma usein pojaksi lyhyiden hiusteni vuoksi. En muista, että tuo tieto olisi häirinnyt minua suuremmin. Teini-iässä ja nuorena aikuisena koin aika ajoin olevani jotenkin vähän vääränlainen tyttö tai nainen. Rintani eivät koskaan kasvaneet kunnolla, kasvonpiirteeni ovat kai melko androgyynit ja ruumiinrakenteeni hoikka ja jäntevä, ei “naisellisen pehmeä”. Minulla on kuitenkin kapea vyötärö ja leveähkö lantio, ja koenkin kehoni jonkinlaiseksi hiukan epämääräiseksi välimalliksi. Valokuvissa androgyynisyyteni korostuu: eräs uusi tuttavuuteni kertoi katsoneensa kahta kuvaani, ja oli omien sanojensa mukaan nähnyt toisessa kauniin naisen ja toisessa komean miehen.

Hormonituotannollani voi mahdollisesti olla osansa sukupuolikokemukseni muodostumisessa. Silti pidän androgyyniä ulkomuotoani lähinnä omalta kannaltani onnekkaana sattumana – on kätevää, ettei minun tarvitse miettiä esimerkiksi rintojen sitomista. Kaikki

trans- ja muunsukupuoliset eivät kuitenkaan jaa tätä kokemusta, eivätkä kaikki muunsukupuoliset halua näyttää sukupuolettomilta. Tätä ei voi kylliksi korostaa; sukupuoli on niin paljon muutakin kuin biologia tai se mitä ulospäin näkyy.

Olen aina pystynyt pukeutumaan feminiinisesti ja meikkaamaan aivan uskottavasti, mutta siitä on tullut enemmän tai vähemmän sellainen olo kuin olisin naamiaiasasussa. Todennäköisesti olisin yhtä hyvin voinut pukeutua maskuliinisesti, mutta se vaihtoehto ei tullut mieleeni ennen kuin aloin tietoisesti kyseenalaistaa sukupuoltani. Nykyään pukeudun useimmiten suhteellisen neutraalisti, sikäli kuin se on ylipäätään mahdollista. Hameita ja mekkoja käytän hyvin harvoin, mutta myös selkeimmin maskuliiniset vaatteet kuten kauluspaidat ja liivit jäävät yleensä kaappiin.

Hiukseni alkoivat lyhentyä pikkuhiljaa kymmenisen vuotta sitten. Arastelin kuitenkin aika pitkään niiden leikkauttamista aivan lyhyiksi. Pelkäsin jostain syystä, että "alkaisin näyttää ihan pojalta". Jälkikäteen ajateltuna tulkitsen, että jollain tasolla tiesin hiuskysymyksen liittyvän muuhunkin kuin esteettisiin seikkoihin. Lyhyttukkainen minusta tuli kolme vuotta sitten, ja ajatus pitkistä hiuksista tuntuu nyt lähes mahdottomalta.

Myös sisäinen kokemukseni on aika ajoin heijastellut epämääräistä oloa siitä, miten en aivan kuulu siihen omakseni määritettyyn sukupuoleen.

Opiskelin teknistä, erittäin miesvaltaista alaa korkeakoulussa. Opiskeluaikoina muistan kokeneeni esimerkiksi niin sanotut tyttösisit – opiskelijajuhlat, joissa

syödään, juodaan ja lauletaan ja joissa ainoat miesosallistujat ovat tarjoilijoita ja esiintyjä – lähinnä kummallisena ja hiukan ahdistavana ajatuksena. En ymmärtänyt, miksi minun olisi pitänyt haluta rajata bileseura jonkin niin sattumanvaraisen kriteerin perusteella kuin sukupuolen.

Myös muu yliopiston naisjärjestön järjestämä ohjelma, joka noihin aikoihin nojasi melko vahvasti stereotypioihin “tyttöjen jutuista”, tuntui niin vieraalta etten kyennyt osallistumaan yhteenkään tapahtumaan, vaikka jollain tasolla ymmärsin naisjärjestön tarpeellisuuden ja olisin halunnut tukea sen toimintaa.

Kaikesta huolimatta elelin ihan tyytyväisenä naislokerossa vielä silloinkin, kun sain omat lapseni. Tässä kohtaa tietämättömyys vaihtoehtoista oli todennäköisesti osin elämää helpottavakin tekijä: ei tarvinnut ahdistua esimerkiksi terveydenhuoltojärjestelmän kanssa asioidessa sen sukupuolen moninaisuuden häivyttävästä sanastosta. Sitä paitsi raskauden pyöristämän vartaloni kanssa naisroolin larppaaminen oli ehkä ylipäätään helpompaa.

Vasta yli kolmekymppisenä löysin kenties ratkaisevan palan palapeliini, kun sain vihdoon epämääräisille vääränlaisuuden kokemuksilleni sanoja. Sosiaalisen median kautta korviini alkoi muutama vuosi sitten kantautua sellaisia sanoja kuin genderfluid, non-binary, muunsukupuolinen, genderqueer, sukupuolieton ja niin edelleen.

Tunnustelin sanoja ja luin muunsukupuolisten ja muiden binäärijärjestelmästä irtisanoutuvien tarinoita. Sovittelin ylleni erilaisia termejä kuin uudenlaisia, jännittäviä vaatteita. Tunsin suurta helpotusta, kun minun ei enää ollutkaan pakko olla nainen.



Parin vuoden itsetutkiskelu on sittemmin johtanut suhteellisen vakaaseen tilaan. Jos jokin termi pitää valita, valintani olisi nyt “sukupuoleton”. Vaikka toimisinkin jossain tilanteessa yhteiskunnassamme “naiselliseksi” määritellyllä tavalla, en tunne ilmentäväni mitään mystistä feminiinistä energiaa, vaan omaa persoonaani ja sosiaalistamisen kautta omaksumiani sekä tietoisesti opettelemiani asioita. Jos pukeudun vaikkapa selkeän maskuliinisesti, tiedostan toki, miten kohtaamani ihmiset saattavat tulkita ulkoasuani, mutten silti itse tunne itseäni “miehekkääksi”.

En kerta kaikkiaan tiedä, miltä sukupuolen kokeminen tuntuu, joten tuntuu loogiselta luokitella itseni sukupuolettomaksi.

Sitä kai helposti kuvittelee, että kun ihminen löytää oman identiteettinsä – sen oikealta tuntuvan lokeron, tai paikan kaikkien lokeroitten ulkopuolelta – asia on loppuun käsitelty ja selvä. Olen kuitenkin saanut huomata, että valitettavasti ainakaan sukupuoli-identiteetin kohdalla tämä ei täysin pidä paikkaansa. Yhteiskuntamme ja kulttuurimme eivät edelleenkään kunnolla tunnusta sukupuolivähemmistöjen olemassaoloa, ja kun binäärioletukseen törmää joka käänteessä, on vaikea olla kyseenalaistamatta itsekin omaa identiteettiään.

Olen miettinyt muun muassa, olenko vain niin traumatisoitunut, etten kykene kokemaan omaa (binääristä) sukupuoltani. Olen myös pohtinut, että tämä saattaa hyvinkin olla jokin vaihe. Klassisia transviihamielisiä ajatuksia.

Mutta: onko sillä oikeastaan mitään merkitystä, jos sukupuolikokemukseni taustalla on jokin trauma? Mitä sitten, vaikka tämä olisikin vain “vaihe” tai vaikka

identiteettini tarkentuisi tästä vielä hiukan johonkin toiseen suuntaan? Se ei tee kokemuksestani vähemmän todellista nyt.

Juuri nyt minun on parempi olla, jos minua ei luokitella naiseksi. Ilahdun joka kerta jos jossain lomakkeessa ei ole pakko valita kahden sukupuolen väliltä, vaan tarjolla on vähintään “muu/en halua kertoa”-vaihtoehto. Arvostan myös sitä kun joku käyttää minusta englanniksi puhuttaessa they-pronominia, niin kömpelöltä kuin se tuntuukin suomen kätevään hän-sanaan verrattuna.

Olen tyytyväinen ja onnellinen omissa nahoissani. Sisäinen ja ulkoinen maailmani ovat enenevässä määrin sopusoinnussa. Riitasointuja tulee oikeastaan vain kun joudun tilanteisiin, joissa minua yritetään ulkoa käsin asettaa lokeroon, johon en koe kuuluvani. Se on lievimmilläänkin turhauttavaa ja saa minut tuntemaan itseni näkymättömäksi.

Mietin usein, miten sukupuolilokerot vahingoittavat transihmisten lisäksi myös cissukupuolisia, sillä kukaan ei sovi kaikilta osin kulttuurimme määritelmiin oikeanlaisista naisista ja miehistä. On vaikea ymmärtää, miksi näistä ahtaista raameista halutaan siitä huolimatta pitää niin tiukasti kiinni. Olen kokenut toistuvaa väärinsukupuolittamista myös ihmisiltä, jotka välittävät minusta ja joiden kanssa olen puhunut asiasta paljon.

Tässä asiassa on siis kaikesta päätellen jotain erityisen vaikeaa. Ehkä setuleeliianlähelle, pakottaakyseenalaistamaan itsestäänselvyyksinä pidettyjä, hyvinkin perustavanlaatuisia asioita ja tekee maailmasta taas vähän monimutkaisemman ja siten vähemmän tutun ja turvallisen tuntuisen paikan? En tiedä, mutta välillä taistelu tuntuu epätoivoiselta.

Haluaisin, että kaikki kaksijakoiseen sukupuolijärjestelmään kynsin hampain takertuvat kuulisivat tämän viestin: Olen olemassa ja minun identiteettini on todellinen ja tärkeä, mutten halua riistää sinulta oikeutta omaan identiteettiisi. Tahdon vain, että sinäkin hyväksyt minut sellaisena kuin olen, vaikka se tarkoittaisi että joudut järjestelemään maailmankuvaasi hieman uusiksi. Sillä minä olen olemassa.

# JESS, SCOTLAND

**It seems that gender binaries are more strongly enforced now than they ever were, with not only toys and clothes being assigned to boys or girls, but also the roles that people play and the work they do. Jess writes here about gendered roles; what is seen as masculine, what is feminine, what used to be unisex, and how for many people in the real world that division has never applied.**

When I was a kid, I loved reading. I still do, actually – stories will always be a great way to experience things you might not get the chance to in your day-to-day life, and to see it all through someone else’s eyes. Because I liked books so much, Mum used to buy me kids’ books in charity shops (it was a lot cheaper!), so I ended up reading a broad raft of different things from all different time periods, so often featuring kids whose real-life lives were, to me, just another form of fantasy as they took place so long ago.

One of my favourite authors as a wee child was Enid Blyton. She was a creative woman with a great imagination, with books featuring toys come to life, fairy folk and funny adults, but best of all, kids like me, my age or a wee bit older, going off on adventures by themselves or living out in the country with their families – which to me as a town kid was

something unreal in itself.

But for all their creativity and freedom, there were some parts of Enid Blyton that were very of their time, that we in the modern world have now moved past from.

I remember vividly, aged seven or eight or so, telling my mother with all the wisdom of the world a seven or eight year old can muster up that I couldn't do the housework she was asking me to do, because I was the wrong gender. In Enid Blyton's view – much like Prime Minister Theresa May's, so recently expressed – there were jobs for boys and jobs for girls, and that was how the world turned on its axis.

My mother's reaction has stuck with me ever since that day. She crouched down to me, got down to my level and said to me, no. That the world wasn't, any more, divided into 'boys and girls'. That anyone could do anything. And so would I please go and do what it was she'd asked of me.

Now, of course, as I've got older I've come to realise that she may well have been saying anything to get the job done on that day, but a statement like that was, at the time for me, extremely eye-opening. It shook to the core the world that Mrs Blyton – and many others like her, authors of that time, even up to more modern times – had so lovingly and painstakingly painted, where boys were boys and girls were girls, men were men and women were women.

I didn't notice at the time, as a small child still learning everything about the world, but I feel looking back that that was a root of not continuing to identify myself with gender. That statement opened up a world of possibilities in my head. If boys can do things meant for girls, and girls things meant for boys, then what are boys and girls? Of course, at that age I

had little to no awareness of genitals and other such physical differences.

And I have to say, the evidence mounted as I grew up. My mother went out to work, she wore trousers and drove a car, and she definitely had her moments of being serious and stern, although women in books were smiley and gracious most of the time, unless they were withered old hags or evil witches. Across town, in my uncle's house, gender stereotypes were twisted a little too – my uncle had been an army man, perhaps the most masculine profession imaginable, but it was still him that did the sewing up when his daughters tore or damaged their clothes, as all kids running about are prone to doing. My uncle swore that this wasn't strange, and in fact that all men should be able to do so – that when he'd served, all the men had to be able to turn their hand to any task necessary, be that sewing, cooking, ironing, or anything else, to be truly self-sufficient and able to take care of themselves, with no wives, mothers or maids to look after them or help out. To him, that was the true way to be a man.

I feel very strongly that a reason we continue in our society to be so attached to gender is very largely habit. Had I grown up, never to have those views they had in books and fiction challenged at a young age, I am sure that even now I would be telling my sons to mow the lawn and wash the car, and my daughters to wash up and do the Hoovering, adamant that the two sets of tasks are inherently suited to each sex, and aren't at all similar (let's face it, mowing the lawn is pretty close to Hoovering the garden).

I'd be dressing my sons in blue and my daughters in pink before they knew what colours were, and gluing a bow to

my baby's bald head before we went out to make extra sure nobody dares to think she's a boy (the scandal! Imagine!) And so it goes from there; telling my sons not to cry, to be strong men even before preschool, telling my daughters not to get dirty, not to speak up or shout, to be good little girls and well-behaved. But when my sons got into fights or made messes, och well, that's just boys being boys, something we have to live with, isn't it? It'd be my job to run around and clean up after them, and then my turn to be shocked when they turned around and expected that of their partners later in life, used to being catered to. It's easy to forget when you're raising children, you're raising adults eventually, too. Everything you say and do has potential to take root.

Ultimately for myself, I don't have an attachment to gender. I'm not heterosexual, which helps – you get to avoid a lot of the pressures placed on you and expectations had of you by your family and the community. We've not yet got to a point as a society, I think, where people know by default how to talk about their gay children dating, marrying, and raising children. We're acceptable, but it's a stretch to not think of us as nice, but sexless – perhaps because diversity of sexual attraction was for such a long time used to suggest that someone was themselves a bad person, and no-one wants to think that about their child or loved one.

Gender doesn't strike me, when I think about myself. I walk through this world feeling that I'm a person, rather than a man or a woman. For me, it's not dramatic. I'm lucky not to have dysphoria in the skin I'm in. I see the media making a great fuss about that kind of statement, trying to fan the flames of outrage about so-called newfangled gender-

neutral clothes, items, and facilities, being ever so careful to not mention that these things are just unisex, a concept and category that's been normalised and accepted for decades now.

When I see a stick figure drawn, I don't assume it's a stick man. I don't see men as default human beings and women as a special, second category, or even more absurdly, a 'minority' who in reality make up 51% of the population. Puts a very different spin on so-called minority studies. I see the questions in magazines aimed at women and at men (each of course, with their specially-tailored content, as if 90% plus of our bodies weren't the same between the genders) "can men and women ever just be friends?" and wonder to myself how these people are managing, in 2017, to work only at single-sex workplaces and to only talk to their neighbours of the same sex, for fear of awakening sexual urges in themselves.

I see the furore about where different kinds of people can go to the bathroom in America, and wonder how wheelchair users feel about it suddenly being a hot topic, the thought of sharing your facilities with people who may have slightly different equipment downstairs. Or I wonder, how is such a debate seen in countries like France, where so many bathrooms are already unisex, and just used for their intended purpose without worrying about who might see you entering and leaving?

The world has come on so much in so many ways since I was a child, in that I can even write a piece like this and have it featured in a publication. I feel we didn't talk about such things as much in the past. I'm glad they're being brought into the open. I'm glad younger generations of kids are



growing up knowing they have options, knowing they aren't broken, hopefully having parents, teachers, or trusted adults to talk about gender issues with if they have any questions or confusion, or if they don't feel at home in their own bodies. Questions are wonderful, and we can learn so much sometimes from how children and young people, with their fresh eyes, look upon certain parts of our world. I'm glad that even now, grown adults are capable of re-thinking some of their assumptions, and not stubbornly sticking to their guns that there are still only several – or, perhaps, only two – ways of doing or being, or living as a person on this planet.

What is masculine and what is feminine not only shift all the time, but at their extremes both occupy such narrow definitions of humanity that I don't feel our society nowadays could function if men and women each tried to stay on exclusively one end of the spectrum. So many of us now are at least to some degree chameleons as we go about our daily lives, willing and able to do tasks traditionally done by the other sex just out of practicality or necessity, especially in this era where we all have so much to do in any given day and all must work together to get through it. It's already acceptable for us to transgress strict gender in many ways, without us even realising we're doing so; it happens every time a man picks something up from the shops or every time a woman decides to put together her latest bargain from IKEA herself, without feeling she must ask for or require help.

What I see now from the younger generations, raised by successively more open-minded parents, in general, and in a more open-minded society, is a tendency to live and let live, and I like that. Younger people nowadays grow up with an

awareness of equality between all of us as something default, rather than a fantasy. Masculinity and femininity are such a wide bound, and I'm glad there's less pressure to follow them so rigidly now – or at least the possibility to consider the options, or to think about why something is the way it is instead of just accepting it.

Today's young people – thanks to the efforts of those of us who've come before telling our stories, and speaking our minds and from our experiences – live in a world with less rigorous policing of Who You Should Be, instead letting you be who you are, and making sure you understand that whoever that is is okay. Less focus put on becoming a certain kind of person based on a recipe somebody tells you to follow, instead of just being your authentic self. Less prejudice against those who don't straight away seem to fit the mould, as we, humans, think again, and come to wonder if we even need the mould at all anymore. We still have a long way to go, but we should equally be proud of how far we've come already.

I hope, perhaps, this short piece in itself might provoke some thoughts in readers.

Thank you for the opportunity to put some of my thoughts and experiences to paper.

# ELY, SCOTLAND

**Queer people and trans people find themselves coming out all the time; having to explain themselves, having to correct misapprehensions or misgendering. Often they are still figuring out who they are, and can't fully answer people's questions, they just know that they don't fit in whatever category they've been assigned so far. In this beautiful coming-out letter Ely writes about their process of coming out again and again as they work things out for themself.**

East of the Moon

Fri 28th April

West of the Stars

2017

All over the place

12 noon

Dear T

I've never written a coming-out letter (at least, I don't remember ever doing so) but I'll try and keep this one as short and clear and to the point as possible.

Right now, I'm in Caffè Nero, but by the time you receive this I'll have probably been round a few venues over a few days / hours because I want to take my time and say exactly what I mean and answer any questions you might have - although I dare say you might still have more.

So... coming out ... again.

Do you remember the first time I told you I was a lesbian? Thinking back, it's a bit of a jumble, but I was 25 and you were just turned or turning 24, and I was shitting myself that I'd offend you and lose you as a friend after all the time it took to get back in touch again.

And all because someone - was it J? - had told me that although you'd come out as gay at 18 (?), you'd gone back in the closet and were now heavily in denial and engaged to a man. Clearly, she'd never heard of bisexuality :P

Anyway, we had a good night that night in the end, even though I'd just had some really bad news (my agent had just died and I found out via text, minutes before you turned up). We walked around Glasgow for about an hour trying to find a pub, and it was freezing, and I met W, and I can't remember what else exactly happened, but at some point in between finding a quiet place and getting that old drunk who called you a gynaecologist (remember my mum cheekily called us 'a pair of gynaecologists'!!!) thrown out of the pub, I finally told you. And I think you might have burst out laughing. Not in a horrible way, obviously. But it was all fine.

**Sat 29th April, 10:25am**

**The conservatory in A's granny's house.**

You might have noticed (but you probably haven't, knowing you!) that, around about four or five years ago, I started using the word 'queer' interchangeably with the words 'lesbian' and 'gay' to describe myself. Well, I pretty much dropped 'gay' altogether and was using 'lesbian' less and less except when I was talking about me and A being in a lesbian relationship. Then S sent me a message the other day

saying ‘Happy Lesbian Visibility Day’ and I just said ‘I’m not sure that label is the best fit for me anymore’. And she was like ‘oh are you forgoing labels’ or something like that, and I was like ‘no, not exactly’.

You remember when we were in the Harvester with A, and I mentioned the word ‘cisgender’ (someone who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth), and you didn’t know what it meant? And me and A had an argument because she didn’t feel like she wanted another label or another word to have to remember the meaning of?

Well, I don’t feel comfortable using that word either. But I don’t necessarily feel that transgender accurately describes me.

Hopefully, I’ve not completely confused you.

Basically, I don’t feel like a woman and never really have. But I don’t feel like a man either. I don’t want to be a man. I feel like a human. A person.

For years, I’ve been trying to cultivate a more androgynous aesthetic, and folk have commented on me either looking skinny or saying that me not liking the way I look means I must have my eating disorder back. And this is frustrating for me because I don’t want to be thin! I want to be lean and athletic with broader shoulders and narrower hips and a flatter chest. I want to look strong and fit and have better biceps.

So what people have thought (what I also thought) was body dysmorphia, is actually gender dysphoria.

I’ve been thinking about this for a long time. And it’s finally starting to make sense.

S said she suspected I was somewhere ‘on the spectrum’ (she means the transgender / non-binary spectrum, although

I'm still unsure about if and where I actually fit) because of the drag kinging and because I'm writing a novel about the trans community.

**Sat 29th April, 5pm, Caffè Nero.**

I've been trying out different labels like 'genderqueer' and 'non-binary' and 'gender nonconforming'. It feels a bit scary though. I feel like I'm supposed to hurry up and pick something, even though S says none of it matters. Well, I think that's what she was saying!

She asked if I had a preferred pronoun, but that stuff doesn't matter to me. It wouldn't bother me what I was referred to as, as long as folk weren't being nasty.

To be honest, nothing much has really changed. Although, on some level everything feels like it's changed. Does that make sense? I hope so.

I don't plan on taking testosterone. And I have thought about a breast reduction but I probably won't go through with that. I'm just trying to be the most authentic I can be.

It's a possibility I'll want to change pronouns in the future to something more neutral. But right now I'm still working things out.

I hope this all doesn't sound nuts!

I'm going to finish writing here because you've just sent me a message and if I don't reply I'll forget!

If you've managed to get to the end of this letter without being completely bamboozled by my ramblings then well done.

Actually, just well done if you've managed to get this far through it.

Thanks for reading.

Your gender-swithering pal

# LAURYNAS, LITHUANIA

**Not every country is as accepting of trans people or supportive of their needs as in the UK. Laurynas writes here about his process of coming out in Lithuania and looking for help, like many in the Adam World Choir, elsewhere in the world.**

I'm a transgender man. I do not really know what and how I should write about it... We are told in Lithuania that this is a disease or some sort of deviation from the ideal variant, called cisgender, but.... So what? Well, someone has diabetes, somebody's death, someone lost his legs, and so on. Fact is, nature is not homogeneous and just the same everywhere. We can't be born perfectly healthy, because we would destroy the evolution in the sense, which is based on bringing all the banana of one palm to be different, and when after attack of all possible diseases at least a few bananas would be those, who can resist all bad nature's tickets. It's like a super turbo preparation for a nature lottery, everyone needs to have some nonsense to be resistant to something else than the others. Maybe the thing, that I want to say, is the fact that being transgender means only that I am resistant to something in more powerful way than cisgender people. Perhaps my strength could be resistance to misunderstandings between the genders. Maybe, wild guess.

I understood my state very late, only at 34 years old. Before that, I had some insights, and during the last 2 years before full self-acceptance I had episodes when I fought a lot against this knowledge. Personally I got a huge help from psychotherapy with the help of a good volunteer specialist, who at that time didn't even have any diploma (now acquired). I had psychotic episodes and I was looking for a person who could help me with that. I have found my life coach very unintentionally through an article I've downloaded. While working with him I had to admit that I am a transgender men and not a homosexual woman. There was a lot of talk with the coach over their disclosure, as both of us are from Lithuania, where similar things are still somehow archaic, it is difficult for the country and its people to recover from the long-standing occupation of the USSR. But for now transgender people in Lithuania are getting easier times: there is the possibility to officially change your documents, to get the diagnosis and hormonal treatment and psychological support, although this all is not compensated.

When I wanted to get opportunities to transition, I didn't find them. The Lithuanian medical system was not very favourable in 2014, it was necessary to choose another country and try to move there. I chose Scotland (or the United Kingdom, because Scotland has not yet recovered its independence). It was unfortunate to leave Lithuania, but since I have travelled and lived in other countries, so I had to have resettlements before and was used to that. It was very difficult to get established here, however, and so far I still feel not quite stable; I have work that doesn't fulfil me, although salary isn't bad. However, I have found the opportunity to



transition here and I think I will be living here until the end of it, because my country has not yet been able to provide the very last surgeries (or series of them). I have future plans that I would like to implement to help people with same destiny, to help them with self-understanding and to free their potential and achieve internal freedom, because we are needed here too. Nature shouts it out loud and in colourful way, just like for everyone else.

For the final word I would like just to add that being a transgender is not dangerous to you or to me. Being transgender person simply means the acceptance of one's body: both the brain and rest of the body. We are human beings and although there is that idea that everything has to remain as naturally as it was created... It has already happened that as a part of nature we are creators on its behalf. We are able to bring the heart of a dead person to someone who needs it to survive... Therefore, it is not worthwhile to reject who you are and what you need solely for the desire to remain authentic, because you lose it in this way as well... Everything lies in the balance, and if not so scientifically speaking, it is matter of a harmony... not the idealistic or the urban one, street wise harmony... harmony I am speaking about is yours, it's mine... And even, if we all stand apart on our roads, we will always understand that we found, what we wanted and that we helped one another, and that, I believe, is the most important thing, man. Isn't it?

Sveiki,

Esu translytis vyras. Nežinau iš tikro, ką turėčiau ir kaip turėčiau apie tai rašyti.... Aš žinau, jog tai – liga ar kažkoks nukrypimas nuo idealesnio varianto, vadinamo cislytiškumu, bet.... Na ir kas? Na, kažkam diabetas, kažkam žvairumas, kas kojos neteko ir pan. Ta prasme, gamta nėra vienalytė ir tiesiog vienoda visur. Mes negalime gimti idealiai sveiki, nes taip sugriautume evoliucija, kurios pagrindas yra visus vienos palmės bananus atvesti kitokiais, kad užpuolus ligoms, kurių irgi yra 9 galybės, bent keli bananai būtų tie, kas gebėtų atsilaikyti. Tai tarsi super turbo pasiruošimas gamtos loterijai, visi turi turėti kažkokių nesąmonių, kad būt atsparūs kažkam taip pat. Gal tai, ką noriu pasakyti, yra tai, kad buvimas translyčiu reiškia tik tai, kad esu atsparus kažkam daug stipriau nei cislyčiai žmonės, gal tai būtų nesusipratimai tarp lyčių. Galbūt. Wild guess.

Savo būseną supratau labai vėlai, tik 34 metų. Prieš tai turėjau įžvalgų, o paskutinius 2 metus iki priėmimo turėdavau epizodų, kuomet labai koviausi su šia žinia. Man asmeniškai padėjo psichoterapija, gero, savanorio specialisto pagalba, kuris tuo metu net neturėjo jokio diplomo (dabar jau įgijęs). Aš turėjau psichozės epizodus ir ieškojau žmogaus, kuris man galėtų padėti su tuo tvarkytis. Labai netyčia per pažįstamo atsiųstą straipsnį radau savo gyvenimo coucher'į. Darbo su juo metu teko pripažinti, kad esu translytis, o ne homoseksuali moteris. Teko ir gerokai padiskutuoti su minėtu pagalbiniu dėl savo atsiskleidimo, nes mes abu kilę iš Lietuvos, kur panašūs dalykai vis dar yra šiočia tokia archaika, šaliai ir jos žmonėms yra sunku atsigausti po ilgų metų TSRS okupacijos. Bet šiuo metu translyčiams žmonėms Lietuvoje lengvėja: atsiranda galimybės oficialiai pasikeisti dokumentus, gauti diagnozę

bei hormoninį gydymą ir psichologinę paramą, nors tai nėra kompensuojama.

Kuomet aš norėjau rasti galimybes keistis, jų neradau. Lietuvos medicinos sistema 2014-iais metais nebuvo itin palanki, teko rinktis kitą šalį ir bandyti į ją persikelti. Pasirinkau Škotiją, arba Jungtinę Karalystę, nes Škotija dar neatkūrusi savo nepriklausomybės. Buvo gaila palikti Lietuvą, bes esu keliavęs ir gyvenęs kitose šalyse, tad persikėlimų esu turėjęs ir anksčiau. Įsivirtinti buvo itin sunku... Ir iki šiol jaučiuosi dar ne visai stabiliai, dirbu visiškai sau tolimą darbą, nors atlygis už jį yra visai neblogas. Vienok aš radau galimybes keistis čia ir manau likti iki jų pabaigos, nes mano šalyje kol kas nėra galimybės gauti paskutinę operaciją (arba jų seriją). Turiu ateities planų, kuriuos norėčiau įgyvendinti, kad padėti bendradaliams suprasti ir išlaisvinti savo potencialą ir pasiekti vidinę laisvę, nes mūsų čia irgi reikia. Gamta tai sako garsiai ir spalvingai, kaip ir kiekvienam kitam žmogui.

Pabaigos žodžiui norėčiau tiesiog pridėti, kad buvimas translyčiu nėra pavojingas nei tau nei man. Buvimas translyčiu yra tiesiog savo kūno priėmimas: tiek smegenų, tiek viso kito kūno. Mes esame žmonės ir nors yra ta mintis, kad viskas turi likti natūraliai kaip sukurta gamtos... Taip jau nutiko, kad mes būdami jos dalimi, kuriame jos vardu taip pat. Mes mokam pernešti žuvusio žmogaus širdį tam, kuriam to reikia, kad išgyventų... Todėl neverta atmesti to, kas esi ir ko tau reikia vien dėl noro išlikti autentišku, nes taip tu tai prarasi taip pat... Viskas slypi balanse, o jei ne taip moksliskai, tiesiog – harmonijoje.. Ne toje... idealioj.. Ne toje, purvinoj liaudiškoje... Ji tavo, ji mano... Ir net, jei mes vis tik išsiskirsime savo keliuose, mes visad suprasime, kad radom tai, ko norėjome ir kad padėjome tame vienas kitam, o tai, manau, ir yra svarbiausia, žmogau. Argi ne?

# SATYA, SRI LANKA

**In many parts of the world, being transgender is misunderstood as being gay. Satya writes here about living in Sri Lanka, and working to improve understanding there.**

I am Satya Baashi, born to a middle class family. This is my life story...

At an early age I was confused confused; pressed by my parents soon I became tough inside. Tight bell bottom trouser. Slim fit white shirt, long eyelashes and mascara, went to school like a queen. Whieeeeeee!!! Boys whistling, yet I don't care, this is me and I love attention. School was my kingdom. Though many found me appealing, I was very much an introvert, surprising isn't it! I managed to come out to my parents and live my life, not let anyone else live it for me.

There were many problems at home because I had a younger brother; being the eldest my parents forced me to act normally, as they defined being gay as abnormal. My mother went on and on about my feminine ways so I thought with great difficulty and joined a gym to be man. Many things happened at the gym; I became buffed up with muscles and I had the time of my life at the gym with many 'straight' guys all at my feet!

I needed to change this body because this is not mine; though it felt good at times, most of the time I am a total mess inside. I did some research and found out that I can be a woman, marry and settle down. This is all I want and I am pretty much nearer to my dreams.

I always wanted to make my voice heard; I always wanted to create a positive change for my country for future transgender people. I was attached to many organisations - Asia Pacific transgender network, where I got myself absorbed in the rights of trans people, and Asia Pacific transgender sex working network. Being attached to the Youth Voices Count I recognised that anyone could make a difference if they just stood up for their rights. I was also a member of United Nation Youth Advisory panelist for marginalised people.

I faced many challenges and difficulties to be in this secure position today.

I am now a free bird; the best thing I have done and am still carrying out, is mobilising my community here in my country. I did not have any person in my life when I needed someone for guidance or for a shoulder to cry on! But I am very happy now that I have many people under my wing that looks up to me!

Besides my work as accounts assistant for an interior designing company there are many things I do in my free time. One thing is that I am a professional Latin, belly, and classical (Indian and Sri Lankan) dancer. Dancing sets me free, I love to dance to the beat. I am also into modeling, as some in my life who looked down on me I am now a capable, empowered trans-woman!

I have to say, be yourself, dream big and with all the things life throws at you, make a difference for all those less fortunate people around you!

මම සත්‍යා ආමි, මධ්‍යම පන්තීක පවුලක උපත ලැබුවෙමි. මම! මගේ ජීවිත කතාව.....

කුඩා කාලයේ මා වියාකුලව සිටියා. මගේ දෛවියන්ගේ බලපෑම මත මම ඉක්මනින්ම සිංහල දැඩි පුද්ගලයකු වුනා. තද බෙල් බෞද්ධයාක් නිදහසේ දැනුණු සුදු පැහැති තද කමිසය, දැනුණු අඟු බිම සහ මස්තය ආලෝපය, මා රූපිකත් වගේ පැයුල් ගියා. Whieeeeeee වඳිඉ !!! කොල්ලේ වැඩිලි ගහනවා, එක් මට ගානක් නැත, මේ මමයි, මම අවධානයට නැමතියි. පාසල මගේ රුපධානියයි. මම ඉතින් අයුරු සිටින අයුරුකරන පුදු වුවද බොහෝම අන්තර්විකිකයන්, පුදුමයක් නොවේද! මගේ දෛවියන්ගෙන් මිඳිලි මට ජීවත්වීමට හැකි විය. මගේ ජීවිතය මම වැඩිම ගණයා යුතුයි. එය මට වෙනුවෙන් වන කිසිවකු වැඩිම කෙරෙයි.,

මට මල්ලි කෙනෙක් නිවසේ නිසා ගෞරව බොහෝම ජර්ගන නිමුණ, පමුණිගිනත්වය අපමාණය දෙසක් හැටියට පිලිගත් මගේ දෛවියන් මා වැඩිමගේ ළමයා වීමෙන් සාමාන්‍ය වැදියට හැසිරෙන්න බල කලා. මගේ අමමා මගේ ස්තරිත්වය ගැන දැන ගෙන ඒ ගැනම දිගුම කතා කරන හෙයින් මම බොහෝම අමාදුවෙන් කල්පනා කරලා පුදුමයෙන් වනේන සීන කියලා ජිම එකට බැඳුනා. බොහෝ දවස් ජිම එකේ සිටුවිය; මගේ හරයේ මාගේ පෞර්වික වැඩිමගේ වැඩිමගේ. කවද ජිම එකේ මට මගේ ජීවිතයේ අවසාන පාදක 'පාදු ලිංගික' කොල්ලේ මගේ පා මුල!

මේ හරයේ මගේ නොවන නිසා එය වෙනස් කිරීමට මට අවශ්‍ය විය; සමහර අවස්ථාවලදී මගේ මට ගෞරව වගේ දැකුණත්, මා සිටින කුල එය වැඩි කාලයක් තිබුණේ අවුල් වියවුලක් ලෙස. මා පර්යේෂණ කරමින් වටහා ගත්තා මට කාන්තාවක් වනේන පුදුමක් බව, වටහා වී එකලස් විය හැකි බව. මෞනික මට අවශ්‍යම. මගේ සිංහල සැබවුනේන ඉතාම ආසන්නයි.

අතින් කටවිය මට කන් දෛන සිතේ කියල මට නිතරම මතකම නිමුණ; මට හැමවිට උවමනාවක් නිමුණ අනාගත පාලිගිනික මිනිසුන්ට සරිලන වාතාවාදයක් මගේ රටේ සකසන්න. මම බොහෝම ආයතනවල -- පාලිගිනික අධ්‍යාපන සඳහා මවිසිත් සහමුලින්ම කැප වුනු වුනු ආසියා පැසිෆික් සම්මුත ජාලයේ සහ ආසියා පැසිෆික් ලිංගික වැඩි ජාලයේ සාමාන්‍යයක් ලෙස මම බැඳී සිටිනවා.

'නුදුණ හඩ' සාමාන්‍යයක් වීමෙන් මට වැඩිමනා නමක්මේ ජීවිතයක්වලට තැන සිටිනවානම් කනට වූනත් වෙනසක් කල හැකි බව. කවද කෞන් කෞන්ලද ජනතාව වෙනුවෙන්, මා එක්සත් ජාතිකයේ සංවිධාන පිලිබඳ උපදෙස්ගත මණ්ඩලයේ ද සාමාන්‍යත්වය දරන්නෙ මි.

අද ඉන්න මේ සුරක්ෂිත නන්වයට එක්කට මට බොහෝම අභියෝග සහ දුෂ්කරතාවලට මුහුණ මුහුණ දෛන වුනා. මම දැන කුරුල්ලෙන් වගේ නිදහස්; මා කල ගෞරව දෛ සහ නවමත් කරගෙන යන දෛ මෞනිකද කම මගේ කටවිය මේ රට ගෙන්වා හැකිමයි.

මහ පෞර්වික සඳහා ගෞ මා වෙනුවෙන් කතා කිරීමට, අවශ්‍ය අවස්ථාවලදී කිසි කෙනෙක් මට උදව්වට සිටියා සිටියා නැත. කමුත් මම දැන් ඉන්නේ ඉතාම සතුටෙන්; මන්තිසඳහන් මගේ පාර්ශවයේ බොහෝම දෙනෙක් මගේ ජීවිතට පනඟවා!

අභියාචනා මධ්‍යස්ථ නිර්මාණ සමාගමක ගිණුම් සහායකයා ලෙස මගේ රැකියාවට අමතරව මගේ නිදහස් කාලය තුළ මා බොහෝ කටයුතු වල යෙදෙනවා. මම වෘත්තීමය ලෙින්, බඩ කටුම සහ සාමප්‍රදායික (ඉන්දියානු හා ග්‍රී ඉපැකික) තරඟකාරී ගිණුම්කරු. කැපවී ගිණුම මට සැහැල්ලු බාවයක් ගෙන දෙනවා; මම කැමතිය කාලයට කටයුතු. තවද මම ආකෘති නිර්මාණය “මොඩල්ලි” වලටත් සහභාගී වෙනවා. සමහර මා දින පත් තත්වයක බැලීමට මම දැන් දක්ෂ කුසලතාවයක් යුත් සම්බල ඇති පාරලික්කික සිද්ධියක්!

මට කටයුතු කියවෙන්නේ , මබ් මබම වෛද්‍ය , ලොකුමට සිතීම මවන්න. ජීවිතයේ මම ලබා ඇති සියලු දේයින්, මම අතරේ සිටින කැනී බැඳී අවිභාවිත මිනිසුන්ගේ ජීවිත රටාවේ වෙනසක් ඇති කරන්න .



# ANDRE, PORTUGAL

**Even within queer communities, there can be prejudice against people who don't fit into binary concepts of 'male' and 'female', 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Even so, when the people we love get to know us they can come to accept us. Andre writes about finding a life and a relationship with their partner in Portugal, despite losing their families and many of their friends.**

A dreamer. Resilient. Artistic. Born on April 23 1996, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, on the island of Madeira, in the city of Funchal, I have a life history that is at least peculiar. "I'm a bit of everything, not wanting to be anything concrete." I identify myself as transgender, non-binary, androgynous and polyamorous.

From an early age I felt different, because of having cerebral palsy, being homosexual and having difficulty in defining my gender according to the stereotypes of society and in knowing how to express my true identity.

Originating from an insular environment, it became more complex to have and get the freedom to be myself, because of it being an environment with a lot of prejudice, and a lack of information and visibility pertaining to the LGBTQ+ community.

In family, school and public environments I have always been incorrectly understood. It was enough for the obstetrician to say “It’s a boy!” for my whole life to be predetermined and defined. The mere fact that a person has male sexual characteristics, and has the XY chromosomes, creates a range of expectations, behaviours, ways of playing, rules, emotions, ways of dressing and gesturing, which condition the full development of someone who in terms of gender is outside the male/female binary.

During my first years of life, I always tended to relate more with girls than with boys, as I didn’t correspond to the typical stereotype of that age, so I was a laughing stock, a target for discrimination and isolation. I was an emotional, fragile, sensitive child and my parents always put me inside a bell jar.

When I began to have sufficient understanding of my surroundings, I realised I would have to give in to all the orders that were given to me, wear the clothing that was imposed on me (only in certain colours and shapes), not choose my toys or express my displeasure in several contexts: practicing sports, cars and typically masculine attitudes. They always shaped me to be what they wanted to see, I was a puppet, without power of decision and choice. Whenever I expressed a desire to have baby dolls and Barbies, they would say yes to deceive me, but they would never get them for me. I loved playing with my cousin’s dollhouse and playing SIMS.

I was always put aside in physical education classes, always with the girls because they are the weakest players. I did not feel integrated in games and activities. The boys were violent with me and I would observe their bad behaviour and

wonder how stupid, immature and insensitive they were.

Between the ages of 12 and 15 years old, when I went with my mother to clothing stores, I would like to give my opinion on what suited her best and what I liked the most, however, I never felt comfortable and prepared at that age to try on clothes associated with the opposite gender. If I would have done that, I would have been condemned and judged for it.

When I went to celebrations, I'd always be very vain and I liked to watch my mother putting makeup on, I would get tired of insisting that I also wanted it, in the end she would end up doing it for me but against her will.

My parents have never given me the freedom to relate with the world around me, I was a lone wolf without a social life or friends. I was prevented from socialising and spending time with certain relatives, I had to satisfy their wills, accept being blackmailed and manipulated. I used to hear that typical phrase: "If you do not do as I say, I will not give you what you want."

There was something in that that made me uneasy, and I felt compelled to repress my true 'self' to fit into the canons and stereotypes of society that aim to dictate what a young gay man "should be" and how he should behave.

I experienced horrible moments of bullying from my family and at school... it was not easy to take these things in. I still perfectly remember the first time I decided to straighten my hair, put makeup on and paint my nails: "A classmate made a point of using this to make fun of me, claiming that I wanted to be a girl!" Both at school and at home, nothing was easy to take. My own mother said to me, "Are you a man

or a cat? Men don't put makeup on or use nail varnish. You look like a girl, all pretty, if only you knew how pretty you look." "Have you put on makeup today, girl?" "You should be ashamed to do what you are doing to yourself."

On one occasion they forced me to remove the nail varnish, they said it was a disgrace for a man to paint his nails, that I was crazy, and gave me an ultimatum: I would either take the varnish off or I would not get my weekly pocket money, I was left with no choice.

The first time I decided to trim the hair on my legs was a scene typical of a horror movie. I was close to getting beaten. My mother barged in on me while I was showering, scolded me severely and asked me what I was doing, saying that a man doesn't shave his legs, and that this was going against Mother Nature.

After this episode, I was told at the next pedopsychiatry session they wanted to hospitalise me because I was crazy, because no man in his right mind would do what I did, simply to shave myself, something so simple and innocent. My father even told me: "You know what you look like to me, a woman, you do it on purpose so people make fun of you, your head is all twisted!"

They did not understand why I enjoyed doing this, and I saw myself forced to suppress these desires. I have spent too many years being what people expected me to be, being what others wanted to see; I stopped being myself, and lived according to others.

From an early age I felt a more feminine side in me (wanting to dye my hair, paint my nails, wear makeup, skirts, dresses, high heels, among other garments and

accessories such as earrings, necklaces and rings). In terms of gender expression it's something ambiguous, although more feminine, somewhere within the gender spectrum. I feel a duel inside of me, a mix of masculine and feminine. It depends a lot on the days, on my state of mind, and it is something that, still today, I am learning how to cope with. One day I might want to wear trousers and a t-shirt, the next day I might want to wear a skirt and a sweater or a dress.

It was very bad for me, an indescribable pain all these years, not being able to express myself, or to be myself, or not have the support of my family in this stage of my life. I got to the point where I got tired of being what others expected me to be.

When I was 18 years old, I left home, without anyone knowing. I was fed up, tired, and needed something new. I left everything, grabbed my savings and came to live in Lisbon (I could no longer handle the homophobic and transphobic bullying that I felt from my family and at school), and a new world was ahead of me. However, the various attempts of being myself in this new city did not go well at all. Many of the boys I was with criticised me for the way I walked, for having dyed my hair, because of the clothes I wore, the way I acted, and so on.

A hairdresser ex-friend of mine said to me, "Do you know what you look like? A gay who broke through the closet door! You're a hysterical faggot, you can't be like that, and you can't dress and behave as you please on the street. Socially, people will distance themselves from you, they will make fun of you, nobody will give you a job, no one will respect you, and they will call you a whore. You can't just wear

what you want outside the house, keep that to yourself, and do what you want behind closed doors, because the way you want to be, I tell you, no man will want you.” This situation further contributed to my decision to ignore this part of me and live according to what others expected of me. And in fact, as time went by, I knew that traumatic experiences with boys were always on the same basis, I decided to continue to repress myself, to try and pass an image of the typical male guy, without the tics and everything else that had been brought to my attention.

But then everything changed. I met my partner through the Manhunt platform on the night of October 6, 2015. I invited him to sleep at my place. In his profile he said that he did not like effeminate boys, transvestites, faggots... But I did give this guy a chance. In my head I thought, “it’s the same thing all over again, no one will ever want me and love me the way I really am.” And then I went back to repress myself, but not for long.

We talked for a few hours, and I started to feel a connection... then came the kisses, the caresses and “we made love”. Could it be love on first sight? It was the beginning of a colourful friendship, without us wanting anything serious it eventually evolved over the course of a few months, without really wanting it we ended up dating. In early 2016 I no longer had the financial support of my parents and the rest of the family, they abandoned me because of my sexuality and identity and because I had a disability (cerebral palsy).

This led us to live together, something that was completely outwith our plans at that stage in our lives. With this, we had to learn to live under the same roof, to share the space,

the belongings, the responsibilities, the tasks of domestic life (I taught Miguel how to cook because he didn't know what he was doing), and at the same time we got to know each other better, especially our personalities, qualities and flaws. You can say that it was a real test of pressure on the relationship, with many challenges, making us both mature rapidly in the first year of the relationship.

Over time our range of friends was substantially reduced (some distanced themselves, others let us down). Neither of our families supports our relationship, which ends up leaving a huge void and has a psychological impact on us both. However, happiness prevailed against all odds.

Five or six months after I met him, I gained the courage to tell him the whole truth about my inner self. I expected a bad reaction, that everything would end from one moment to the next, that he would not want me because of the way I am and that he would no longer be attracted to me. To my surprise, the reaction turned out to be very positive, he supported me and continues to support me; he says that I must decide to live as who I am, to be what makes me happy, my true self. I never thought that someday I would be able to change the eyes with which someone sees something, its shape, with my essence, and I was able to deconstruct the prejudices that my boyfriend had about people outside the norm. Because he likes me for who I am, from within, and not because of my identity or what I wear.

In mid-2016 I participated in a television debate, on the TV programme called 'What if it was you?', about my experience of homophobia. After this debate I did a photo shoot with a friend; according to her, I would have the

potential to do some photography or television work, and she wanted to take me out shopping. Once again my fear of speaking up took over and I let her purchase solely men's clothing. After seeing the final result, and although I loved the photos, I felt a void, there was a piece of me missing in those photos, I felt incomplete.

On the one hand, I liked the change of look, but I felt the need to demonstrate the feminine side in me, I would look at myself in the mirror and I would realise that a part of me was missing. Once more I felt that I was being carried away by the standards and impositions accepted by society, I had to dress like 'a boy', there was no freedom to be something different, something I identified myself more with.

I dream of opening the first LGBTQ+ tea house in Portugal, giving the population a safe and alternative space (in contrast to the nightclubs and bars that exist in and around Bairro Alto, catering to a mainly gay clientele) and possibly to create job opportunities with the existing LGBTQ+ associations to allow the access of minorities to the labour market and to pave the way for a genuine inclusion of these people, also creating a chain of mutual aid in the community.

I do not have a complex in regards to my genitals, but I would like to have a physical appearance that would make me go unnoticed. I would be doing this change not so much for myself, but to fit into a role which society feels comfortable seeing me as. In Lisbon people notice at first sight that I have a beard and hair on my chest and legs and see me automatically as "a boy dressed like a girl", I end up suffering a lot from that. But I know I am correct in accepting myself for who I am, we live in a society where two gender roles



are well defined, man and woman, and when people in the middle affirm themselves, it's a challenge. There is still a lot of ignorance and invisibility.

I do not think of myself as someone different, but for other people I am. I would like for them to see me neither as a boy nor as a girl. People get scared with what they do not understand. I would like to show that it is not my sexual orientation or identity that defines me, that is too trivial. If they were able to look beyond that, they would realise that we are all the same. I've already been in some unpleasant situations, for example, I notice people looking at me intensely from top to bottom.

I even notice it with people I know, they become apprehensive towards what I'm trying to convey on a daily basis and don't take me seriously when I am comfortable with who I am, without filters. I've heard comments from people I considered my friends, telling me that I am strange, that they do not like to be next to me when I'm wearing a skirt, a dress, high heels or makeup, telling me that I should only wear that in the house, never in the street. I have even tried to do work as a model, but I was never contacted with a proposal, clearly because I am not the stereotypical "man". I would like to become an androgynous model and also to portray my disability, after all that is a part of me... Even if I don't match the typical stereotypes of beauty it does not mean that I would not do a good job. I recognise that I have potential, even if the outside world does not want to believe in me. It's frustrating, but it's them who lose out. In Portugal, to have the opportunity to work in this industry you need to be "brand friendly", and to me this means: "don't be yourself"

I participated in a documentary in March 2017 produced by students of the 'Television and Film Production' course of the World Academy. The documentary was on the subject of trans and explored the various aspects that this term (unknown by many) encompasses.

The documentary aims to portray the day-to-day lives of a group of people that, although similar, have some differences, not so obvious at first sight. By comparing the day-to-day life of trans and cis people, and by ending with a situation so simple (but at the same time peculiar) like how we enter a bathroom, we realise what unites all these people.

Many people feel that, as I begin to accept myself, I am no longer myself, I no longer have my qualities, my values, my ideals, my interests. Sometimes I seriously consider that I might have some 'problem', because I see boys looking at me, judging me and wanting me only for my body, not as a person (for my essence, personality and values). It's hard to deal with prejudice coming from within the community itself.

There is nothing wrong with me, what should change is the mentality and the pressure they end up putting on our existence. We are all different, and being different should not be seen as something bad, it is something authentic and unique. This in itself leads others to question their identities, beliefs, prejudices and ideals.

Preferably, I would like to change my name to a gender-neutral one. And with that, in a way, close a chapter in my life, mourn it and save the better memories lived by André. However, the names I identify myself with tend to be foreign and are not allowed in Portuguese law, names like Andy

or Andrea (which in Italian are valid for both males and females). Amongst the names I found, the ones that most caught my attention were Axel, Brice, Bryan, Cris, Oliver, Ruby and Sena (the underlined names can only be used as a second name). I think that “Bryan Cris” and “Bryan Brice” would be good choices, which I particularly like.

I am a world of things besides being transgender... I am intelligent, fun, a fighter, I have the talent to cook, make others laugh, give advice, I’m original, cute (some say so), loyal, nice and brave. I never thought that I could be this many things, at the same time. The human being is so complex.

All these small steps of activism that I have been taking leave me very proud of myself, of being able to have the courage, drive and determination that so many lack, in order to live in peace with themselves. My life has not been easy, I have had more than enough reasons to demotivate myself and give up, but I know I’m stronger than that and I have a bright future ahead of me, for which I will continue to fight as I do my best to transform the world. Love always wins.

Sonhador. Resiliente. Artístico. Nasci a 23 Abril de 1996, no meio do Oceano Atlântico, na Ilha da Madeira, cidade do Funchal, e tenho uma história de vida no mínimo peculiar. “Sou um pouco de tudo, sem querer ser nada em concreto.” Identifico-me como transgénero, não binário, género fluido, andrógino e poliamoroso.

Desde pequeno que me sinto diferente, pelo facto de ter paralisia cerebral, ser homossexual e pela dificuldade em definir o meu género conforme os padrões e estereótipos da sociedade, e saber como exprimir a minha verdadeira identidade. Tendo origem num ambiente insular, tornava-se mais complexo haver e ter liberdade para ser eu próprio, por se tratar de um meio com imenso preconceito, falta de informação e de visibilidade por parte da comunidade LGBTQ+.

Nos ambientes familiar, escolar e público sempre fui lido incorretamente. Bastou o obstetra exclamar “É um rapaz!”, para ficar com toda a minha vida traçada e demarcada. O simples facto de uma pessoa apresentar caracteres sexuais masculinos, e ter cromossomas XY, cria um leque de expectativas, comportamentos, brincadeiras, regras, emoções, modos de vestir, gesticular, que condicionam o desenvolvimento pleno de alguém que, em termos de género, está fora do binário homem/mulher.

Durante os primeiros anos de vida, tive sempre tendência a relacionar-me mais com as raparigas, do que com os rapazes, dado não corresponder ao estereótipo típico da idade, pelo que era alvo de chacota, discriminação e isolamento. Sempre fui uma criança emotiva, frágil, sensível e os meus pais sempre me colocaram numa redoma de vidro.

Quando comecei a ter entendimento suficiente do que me rodeava, tomei consciência que teria de ceder a todas as ordens que me eram dadas, vestir a roupa que me era imposta (só em determinadas cores e feitios), não poder escolher os meus brinquedos nem expressar o meu desagrado em vários contextos: praticar desportos, carros e atitudes tipicamente masculinas. Sempre me moldaram para ser o que queriam ver, eu era uma marioneta, sem nenhum poder de decisão e escolha. Sempre que manifestava vontade em ter Nenucos e Barbies, diziam que sim para me iludir, mas nunca me ofereciam. Adorava brincar com a casa de bonecas da minha prima e jogar SIMS.

Era sempre colocado de parte nas aulas de educação física, sempre com as raparigas por serem os elementos mais fracos. Não me sentia integrado nos jogos e brincadeiras. Os rapazes eram violentos comigo e eu observava os seus maus comportamentos e ficava a pensar o quão estúpidos, imaturos e insensíveis eles eram.

Entre os doze e quinze anos, quando ia com a minha mãe às lojas de roupa, eu gostava de dar opinião sobre o que lhe assentava melhor e aquilo que gostava mais de ver, porém nunca me senti confortável e preparado para nesta idade experimentar roupas associadas ao género oposto, se alguma vez o fizesse, iria ser condenado e julgado por isso.

Quando ia a celebrações, sempre fui muito vaidoso e gostava de observar a minha mãe a pôr maquilhagem, fartava-me de instituir que também queria, no fim acabava por me fazer a vontade mesmo contrariada.

Os meus progenitores, nunca me deram liberdade para relacionar-me com o mundo em redor, era um bicho do mato

sem vida social nem amigos. Impediam-me de socializar e conviver com certos familiares, tinha de lhes satisfazer todas as vontades, aceitar ser chantageado e manipulado. Ouvia a típica frase: “Se não fizeres o que eu digo, não te dou o que queres”.

Havia ali algo que me deixava inquieto, e via-me obrigado a reprimir o meu verdadeiro “Eu” para me encaixar nos cânones e estereótipos da sociedade, que pensam ditar o que um rapaz gay “deve ser” e como se deve comportar.

Vivi momentos horrorosos de bullying por parte da família e no meio escolar... Não foi fácil digerir essas coisas. Ainda me lembro perfeitamente da primeira vez em que decidi alisar o cabelo, usar maquilhagem e pintar as unhas: “Um colega de turma fez questão de usar isso como motivo de chacota, e de eu querer ser uma Maria!”, tanto em meio escolar como em casa nada foi fácil de digerir. A minha própria progenitora dizia-me: “Tu és um homem ou um gato? Os homens não se pintam, nem usam verniz. Pareces uma Maria, toda vaidosa, se soubesses o quão bonita ficas.”, “Já te pintaste hoje, Maria? Devias ter vergonha de fazeres o que estás a fazer a ti.”

Inclusive numa ocasião obrigaram-me a tirar o verniz, disseram que era uma vergonha um homem pintar as unhas, que eu era maluco da cabeça, fizeram um ultimato: ou tirava o verniz ou não tinha a semanada, fiquei sem escolha. A primeira vez que decidi aparar os pêlos das pernas, foi uma cena típica de um filme de terror. Por pouco não apanhei uma tarefa. A minha mãe invadiu o duche, ralhou severamente comigo e perguntou-me o que estava a fazer, dizendo que um homem não se depila, e que isso era ir contra a mãe natureza.

Depois desse episódio, disseram-me que na próxima consulta de pedo-psiquiatria queriam internar-me porque eu estava louco da cabeça, pois jamais nenhum homem no seu perfeito juízo faria o que eu fiz, simplesmente depilar-me, algo tão simples e inocente. O meu progenitor, chegou a dizer-me: “Sabes o que é tu me pareces, uma mulher, tu fazes de propósito para que as pessoas façam pouco de ti, tens a cabeça toda trocada!”

Não compreendiam o porquê de eu gostar de fazer isso, e vi-me obrigado a reprimir essas vontades. Vivi demasiados anos, a ser aquilo que as pessoas esperavam que eu fosse, a ser o que os outros queriam ver, deixei de ser eu, e vivia consoante os outros.

Desde cedo que senti um lado mais feminino em mim (querer pintar o cabelo, unhas, usar maquilhagem, usar saias, vestidos, sapatos de salto alto, entre outras peças de vestuário e acessórios como brincos, colares e anéis). Em termos de expressão de género trata-se de algo ambíguo, porém mais feminino, algures dentro do espectro do género. Sinto um duelo dentro de mim, um mix de masculino e feminino. Depende muito dos dias, do meu estado de espírito, e é algo com que eu, ainda hoje, estou aprender a lidar. Num dia posso querer usar calças e t-shirt, no dia seguinte posso querer usar uma saia e uma camisola ou um vestido.

Foi muito mau para mim, uma dor indiscreível estes anos todos, não poder me exprimir, nem ser eu mesmo, nem poder ter o apoio da família nesta etapa da minha vida. Cheguei a um ponto em que fiquei farto de viver aquilo que os outros esperavam que eu fosse.

Aos 18 anos saí da minha terra natal, sem ninguém

saber, estava farto, cansado, e precisava de novos ares. Deixei tudo, agarrei nas minhas poupanças e vim viver para Lisboa (devido a não suportar mais o intenso bullying homofóbico e transfóbico que se fez sentir na esfera familiar e escolar), e um mundo novo se avizinhou. Porém as diversas tentativas nesta nova cidade a tentar ser eu próprio não correram nada bem. Muitos dos rapazes com quem estive criticavam-me pela forma de andar, por ter o cabelo pintado, pelas roupas que vestia, pela forma de agir, entre outros.

Uma ex-amiga minha cabeleireira, disse-me: “Sabes o que me pareces? Um gay que arrombou a porta do armário! És uma bicha histórica, não podes ser assim, andar vestido e te comportares como queres na rua. Socialmente, as pessoas vão-se afastar de ti, vão gozar contigo, ninguém te vai dar emprego assim, ninguém te vai respeitar, vão-te chamar de puta. Não podes usar o que queres fora de casa, guarda isso para ti, e faz o que queres só dentro de quatro paredes, porque assim como tu queres ser, digo-te, nenhum homem te vai querer.” Essa situação ainda contribuiu ainda mais para eu decidir ignorar essa parte de mim, e viver consoante aquilo que os outros esperavam de mim. E de facto, à medida que o tempo foi passando, os traumas com os rapazes que ia conhecendo eram sempre à base do mesmo, decidi continuar a reprimir-me, tentando passar uma imagem do típico rapaz masculino, sem tiques, e tudo aquilo que me tinham vindo a chamar à atenção.

Entretanto tudo mudou. Conheci o meu parceiro através da plataforma Manhunt na noite de 6 Outubro de 2015, fiz um convite para dormir em minha casa. No perfil dele dizia que não gostava de rapazes efeminados, travestis, bichas...



Porém dei uma oportunidade a este rapaz. Na minha cabeça só pensava, “Outra vez a mesma coisa, nunca ninguém me vai querer e amar como realmente sou.” e lá voltei a reprimir-me, mas não por muito tempo.

Conversámos durante umas horas, e comecei logo a sentir uma ligação... Depois vieram os beijos, os carinhos e “fizemos amor”. Será que foi amor à primeira vista? Foi o início de uma amizade colorida, sem querermos algo sério, que acabou por evoluir com o passar dos meses. Sem querer, acabaram a namorar um com o outro. No início de 2016, deixei de ter o suporte financeiro por parte dos meus pais e restante família, estes abandonaram-me quer devido à minha sexualidade e identidade, quer ao facto de eu ter uma deficiência (paralisia cerebral).

O que levou a que tivéssemos de passar a morar juntos, algo que estava completamente fora dos planos nesta altura das nossas vidas. Com isto, tivemos que aprender a conviver diariamente debaixo do mesmo teto, aprender a partilhar o espaço, os pertences, as responsabilidades, as tarefas da vida doméstica (ensinei o Miguel a cozinhar pois ele era um autêntico nabo), e ao mesmo tempo íamo-nos conhecendo melhor nomeadamente as nossas personalidades, qualidades e defeitos. Pode dizer-se que foi um verdadeiro teste de pressão à relação tão precoce que tínhamos, com muitos desafios, o que nos fez amadurecer muito logo no primeiro ano da relação.

Com o tempo o nosso leque de amigos foi-se reduzindo substancialmente (uns afastaram-se, outros desiludiram-nos). Nenhuma das nossas famílias apoia a nossa relação, o que acaba por deixar um enorme vazio e impacto psicológico em ambos. Porém, a felicidade tem vencido against all the odds.

Passados cinco/seis meses de o conhecer, ganhei coragem e contei-lhe toda a verdade sobre o meu íntimo. Esperava uma reação péssima, que tudo acabasse de um momento para outro, que ele não me quisesse por ser assim como sou, que deixasse de se sentir atraído por mim. Para minha surpresa a reação acabou por revelar-se muito positiva, apoiou e continua a apoiar-me, diz que devo decidir viver como quem sou, ser aquilo me faz feliz, o meu verdadeiro eu. Nunca pensei que algum dia seria capaz de mudar a forma e os olhos com que alguém vê algo, com a minha essência fui capaz de desconstruir os preconceitos que o meu namorado tinha por pessoas fora da norma padrão. Porque ele gosta de mim tal como eu sou, pelo meu íntimo, e não pela minha identidade ou pelo que visto.

Em meados de 2016 participei num debate televisivo acerca da minha vivência da homofobia, no programa “E se fosse consigo?”. Após esse debate fiz uma sessão fotográfica com uma amiga, pois segundo ela eu teria potencial para fazer algum trabalho fotográfico ou em televisão, e fez questão de levar-me às compras. Mais uma vez o meu medo de falar foi mais alto e deixei que me comprasse única e exclusivamente roupas de homem. Após ver o resultado final, apesar de ter adorado as fotos, senti um vazio, faltava ali um pedaço de mim, senti-me incompleto.

Por um lado, gostei da mudança de visual, porém sentia a necessidade de demonstrar a parte feminina que há em mim, olhava-me ao espelho e constatava que faltava uma parte de mim. Mais uma vez sentia que me estava a deixar levar pelos padrões e imposições do aceitável pela sociedade, tinha que me vestir “à menino”, não havendo liberdade para ser algo diferente, com que eu me identificasse mais.

Eu tenho o sonho de abrir a primeira casa de chá LGBTQ+ em Portugal, permitindo dar assim à população um espaço seguro e alternativo (em contraste às discotecas e bares existentes no Bairro Alto e arredores, voltados maioritariamente para o público gay) e ainda, possivelmente criar uma bolsa de emprego protegido com as associações LGBTQ+ existentes para permitir assim a inserção de minorias no mercado de trabalho e desbravar caminho para uma verdadeira inclusão destas pessoas, criar também assim uma cadeia de entajuda na comunidade.

Não tenho complexos com os genitais, porém gostaria de ter um físico e uma aparência que me fizesse passar mais despercebido. Eu estaria a fazer essa mudança não por mim, mas para me encaixar num papel em que a sociedade se sinta confortável em ver-me. Em Lisboa as pessoas notam à primeira vista que tenho barba e pêlos no tronco e membros e lêem-me automaticamente como “um rapaz vestido como rapariga”, acabo por sofrer imenso com isso. Mas, sou válido em assumir-me assim como sou, vivemos numa sociedade em que os dois papéis de género estão bastante definidos, o homem e a mulher, e quando alguém que está no meio se afirma, é um desafio. Há ainda imenso desconhecimento e invisibilidade.

Eu não me acho diferente, mas para as pessoas eu sou. Gostaria que me interpretassem nem como rapaz nem como rapariga. As pessoas assustam-se com aquilo que não compreendem, mostrar que não é a orientação sexual e identidade aquilo que me define, sendo estas capazes de olhar para além disso, apercebem-se que somos todos tão iguais e isso é demasiado banal. Já me aconteceram algumas situações desagradáveis, por exemplo, observar várias pessoas a olhar-me intensamente de cima a baixo.

Chego a aperceber-me mesmo nas pessoas que conheço, ficam apreensivas sobre aquilo que eu estou a querer transmitir no dia a dia e acabo por não ser levado a sério por me assumir como sou, sem filtros. Já ouvi comentários desagradáveis de pessoas que considerava amigos, dizerem-me que eu sou estranho, que não gostam de estar ao meu lado quando estou a usar saia, vestido, sapatos de salto alto ou maquilhagem, dizerem-me que só deveria andar assim dentro de casa, jamais na rua. Já tentara inclusive fazer trabalhos como modelo fotográfico, mas nunca fui convocado para nenhuma proposta, claramente por não corresponder ao estereótipo de “homem”. Gostaria de tornar-me um modelo andrógino e retratar também a minha deficiência, afinal isso faz parte de mim... Lá por não corresponder aos típicos estereótipos de beleza, não significa que não desempenharia o meu papel com mérito. Reconheço que tenho potencial, mesmo que o mundo lá fora não queira acreditar em mim

É frustrante, mas são eles que perdem. Em Portugal para ter a oportunidade de trabalhar nestes mundos é preciso ser-se “brand friendly”, o que para mim significa “não seres tu mesmo”.

Particpei num documentário, em Março de 2017, chamado “Sou”, produzido por alunos do curso “Produção para Televisão e Cinema” da World Academy, que recai sobre a temática trans, sendo explorados os vários aspetos que este termo (desconhecido por muitos) engloba.

Este documentário pretende retratar o dia a dia de um conjunto de pessoas. Pessoas essas que, apesar de semelhantes, possuem algumas diferenças, não tão óbvias a uma primeira vista. Confrontando o dia a dia de pessoas trans e pessoas cis, e acabando com uma situação tão simples (mas peculiar em

simultâneo) como entrar numa casa de banho, percebemos o que une todas as estas pessoas.

Particpei igualmente num artigo e sessão fotográfica da edição de Janeiro de 2018 da revista *Vogue Portugal*, onde foram abordadas várias histórias de pessoas trans. Muitas pessoas consideram que, ao começar a afirmar-me, deixei de ser eu, de ter as minhas qualidades, os meus valores, os meus ideais, os meus interesses. Por vezes chego a pensar seriamente que devo ter algum “problema”, pois vejo os rapazes a olharem para mim, julgarem-me e quererem-me apenas e só pelo meu corpo, não enquanto pessoa (pela minha essência, personalidade e valores). É duro lidar com preconceito vindo de dentro da própria comunidade.

Não há nada de errado comigo, o que deveria mudar é a mentalidade e o peso que estes acabam por colocar no nosso ser. Todos somos pessoas diferentes, e o ser diferente não deve ser encarado como algo mau, é algo autêntico e único. Isso por si só leva a que os outros questionem as suas identidades, crenças, preconceitos e ideais.

Gostaria de mudar o nome para algo agénero, preferencialmente. E com isso de certa forma encerrar um capítulo da minha vida, fazer o luto e guardar as melhores memórias vividas pelo André.

Eu sou um mundo de coisas para além de ser transgénero... Sou inteligente, divertido, lutador, tenho talento para cozinhar, fazer os outros rir, dar conselhos, sou original, giro (dizem que sim), leal, simpático e corajoso. Nunca pensei em poder ser tantas coisas ao mesmo tempo. O ser humano é tão complexo.

Todos estes pequenos passos de ativismo que vou dando

deixam-me muito orgulhoso de mim mesmo, o poder ter a coragem, garra e determinação que falta a muitos para poderem viver em paz consigo mesmos. A minha vida não tem sido fácil, tenho tido mais do que meras razões para desmotivar e desistir, mas sei que sou mais forte e tenho um bom futuro a aguardar por mim, pelo qual vou continuar a lutar e fazer os possíveis para transformar o mundo. O amor vence sempre.

# PATRICK, ROMANIA

**Many trans people have to wait till their family is gone, or else lose them, before they can become who they feel they ought to be. In the process, they find new friends and make new family. Patrick writes here about the feeling of liberation when he finally took that first step towards being a ‘self-made man’.**

I go inside the house from the freezing cold outside. It's early December. I take out food from the parcel I received from back home: some schnitzels, pickles, bread. I start to eat compulsively, same way I do every time. Behind me is the couch where mom spent her two weeks after being released from the hospital. The improvised system with which I had to pump tea into her stomach through a tube, twice a day, is hung up on a nail. A bit of black thread with an empty tube, upside down, bottomless, tinted yellow by the tea.

When I took mom back ‘to her place’, the living-room was filled with flowers, the tiles in the hallway were gleaming, as were the shelves of the old furniture, full of books from swanky collections. My dad had even washed the windows of all the four rooms and two balconies, you could see the cloth track marks on them. He spent two months on his own. The house was warm, the flowers were on the mantelpiece, mom hugged him, “Thank you, daddy! I didn't think I'd make

it home.” They stood in the doorway to the living-room, wrapped in an embrace, I went to the bathroom to cry. A painful joy.

The schnitzels are cold, but they go well with the pickled gherkins. A few years back, mom caught on to the fact that the small ones are the best, because they’re crunchier. They were from that summer, before the cancer. The black thread hangs in my soul, through my throat, coils up in my plexus. I stop and start shaking, it’s suddenly very hard for me to breathe. I stand up from the table and sit on the couch, “you were bound to collapse at some point.” I’m thinking maybe she doesn’t know what she’s talking about, there’s no way I can collapse. But I collapse, yes, I collapse, and in order for my lungs to receive air, they need to turn the carbon dioxide into tears. I’m not crying, it’s just that tears are flowing. Two months, the Fundeni Hospital, my mom crying one morning, consoled by a nurse, my mom in Intensive Care, after a seven hour surgery, my mom ten kilos thinner, my mom taking the first shower after two weeks in the bathroom that smelled like shit, my mom dragging the tubes along with her down the hospital hallway, my mom wriggling in pain after eating a slice of ham, which I allowed her to eat, my mom. I collapse.

The metal my cage is made of was cast into shapes when I was 17. Over the past years, it’s gotten smaller, the air has become unbearable and the metal walls rattle unnervingly with each tiny touch. Then, at 17, I understood that being “a boy trapped in a girl’s body” is the devil’s work. Also back then, the cage, warm and sturdy, was welded air-tight. I was left alone, in the metallic silence, and at my feet were the only two possible options: I either die, or make it; white or black, black or white.



We enter the house in silence, I sit down on the couch. I take a bottle of water from underneath the red Ikea coffee table and drink. I put the cap back on and put it down, the couch is slouching in the middle. I look down at my chest: Parental advisory. Explicit content, a grey hoodie. I hold onto the bottle with both hands and start hitting the table with it. I want to break everything. I want to not scare Alex. She understands that this is the moment, the moment I can't go through anymore, and says, "Let's give you the shot!"

It's morning. The September sunlight is soft, I don't have to sleep in my boxers anymore, and I no longer wake up in a puddle of sweat. I take a quick shower, the small boiler has me spending seven minutes tops in the stall. I put shaving gel in the palm of my hand and the blade slides down my cheeks. It doesn't take long, the hairs are few and far between, but I now have enough for a small goatee. This is the only thing that's been pissing me off for the past 21 months, that I'm not growing a beard on my cheek already. I have my dad's genes, I'm safe, I won't go bald, even if my hairline has pulled back into a rounded W. I smile in the mirror, a friend has recently told me that the shape of my face has altered, the bones have become more prominent, the face has elongated a little. I smile with my whole mouth and my eyes go Chinese. I think I'll have bags under my eyes in my old age, but who cares...

I learn the most from the news on Radio France International. Today I pick up that the cost incurred per refugee by the Romanian state is 1.8 lei for housing, 3 lei for food, and .6 lei for the daily allowance. Well, for fuck's sake, you try living one day on that kind of money. I've got an egg and some cheese left from the parcel from back home. When

I get food from my parents, I live on it for about two weeks. I'm worried about my mom, she works a lot, she gets worked up for everyone, she eats slightly off kilter. The cancer is breathing down our neck. I break the egg in the pan, I'm too lazy to also pour oil. I add in the cheese, too, it melts a little. It's enough, I've had enough, and I forgot to buy bread anyway.

When the first needle, with the last drop of the first milliliter of testosterone went out of my skin on that winter's day, the walls of the metal cage vanished. They'd squeezed tightly around me, pressing down on all my bones. And when they disappeared, I looked astonished at Alex and all around me. I was waiting for someone to cut off a cord coming out of my belly button. I laughed coyly, wide-eyed, with raised eyebrows. That's it? Is this what Life feels like? Wow. Alex is holding the empty syringe and I know that neither the female endocrinologist who told me "But why do you want to do this, you'd be pretty as a girl, too?", nor the female endocrinologist who stopped answering my calls can stop me now. There is no stopping me now. There is no way back. Never. Not for the world.

And that's how euphoria starts. I'm a god, I'm the strongest man on Earth, I'm one step away from climbing to the top of the Intercontinental and yelling out that I'm trans; that it took me eleven and a half years, eleven goddamn years — but I did it, you losers, I did it! I obsessively listen to Rudimental - Free, I swim a hundred laps in one go, I read six books a week, I run for an hour without stopping and I have the strength to hold mom in my hours after her chemo sessions and to assure her she'll be all right, even if she's

shaking, crying, and refusing to take off her wig.

When I go back to Bucharest, I go out every night, drink half a liter of spirits, hook up, come home in the morning, and fall asleep on my half of the bed. I viscerally reject anything that has to do with the old me, I bag up my whole life from before, tie a knot, and fucking kick it into the ether. The money runs out quickly, but I don't think about that, I have to have fun, live. I deserve it. I don't want to work, I've been working a lot, a lot.

One month, two, three, four. I have new friends. Sasha is there all the time, conciliating, curious, patient, and loving. He carries me home drunk, listens to me, shares his last pennies with me. Five months, six. I slowly, gradually calm down. I don't want anyone to go through what I went through, I don't want to leave Sasha alone in the fight, and I understand I, too, have the strength to fight for those like me. I do it. The void I lived in and the feeling I'm a winner give me courage. I feel, as I've always sensed it, that now is also the time to fight for my art. And that my art cannot be my art without the word 'trans' in it. I pay attention to all the changes, my voice has deepened, my biceps have grown, my hips have narrowed. My hands smell weird, I notice this a lot, I think I'm dirty and use a lot of soap. Much later on, I realise this is my new scent. It's easier for me to drive out of a big parking lot, I remember routes, it's easier for me to connect the information, I discover the word 'extrospective' on my own and realise I stumble when I want to tell others about this. How the hell do I take out the words in my head? Hm. I learn and realise that my identity is not that of a man, but transgender man, I don't want to and don't have to deny this.

I am still unable to commit to a relationship, I don't want to, either, and when I think I do, I realise that I can't. But I solemnly swear to myself I'll stop lying, this seems to me the utmost form of respect. I love and am loved intensely, but after two days I need to go back to my freedom, it's my inalienable right. I return and leave again, destroying any beautiful, honest closeness. When I'm left alone, I long, when I get there I want to leave.

"We're not allowed to leave everything to chance, just like we're not allowed to drown. Swim!" John Fowles – *The Magus*, p. 148 (June 3, 2005)

The bag returns from the ether and falls at my feet. I kneel and open it. A wave of remorse smacks me right in the face. That's me, my family, my friends in there—their love has been saving me all these years. I miss them, all of them. I look at myself inside the bag and get the odd, endearing sense that I had a twin, on whose existence my own depended. That she suffered a lot, worked a lot, struggled a lot for me to exist, and that when I started to be, she ceased to exist. I'd like to be able to look her in the eye and hold her in my arms and thank her and promise her that nothing was in vain, that I won't let her down. I apologize for the past months.

I have the bitter taste of all the souls I made suffer. I constantly return to my quotations notebook.

"[...] don't ever hurt the heart of man." Nikos Kazantzakis – *Alexis Zorba*, p. 284 (January 10, 2004)

It's hot outside, even if the hottest summer in recorded history has ended. I'm a shirt, not a t-shirt kind of guy, and I leave one extra button unbuttoned. So what if my binder is showing? I get along well with my anatomy, I no longer

reject anything about myself. Surgery can wait, I have a lot, a lot of work to do. I love every day and am grateful for this. I am grateful for the egg with a bit of cheese, for tobacco. I need nothing new, I feel like I have too much as it is. Books you can never have too many, it's just the thought I don't have the time to read them all that upsets me. I'm grateful for thinking, for practicing non-judgmental thinking. I'm grateful for starting to form a better understanding of social mechanism, to identify the patterns along which people function, for being able to understand the context I live in, and for having the strength to revolt. I'm grateful for being curious. I'm grateful that the people in my community are my friends. I'm grateful whenever we share pains, clothing, and food among us. I want to take a grinder to all the metallic, air-tight sealed boxes. I live in constant fear of learning that one of them may have collapsed.

My work has become my number one priority. What I want to do has stood out and become a priority in my head. It is time to return everything I've ever received. Poverty teaches me a great deal, I'm the richest man on earth.

"[...] and power alone breeds power, this is what they don't know[...]" Dostoevsky – *Crime and Punishment*, p. 175 (August 18, 2004)

But I know life won't let me get off so easily, I know it will knock me out a lot. 'cause that's what life is like, no matter how much of a trans-winner I am. But, in my head, every morning when I look in my small bathroom mirror, I tell it, "C'mon, bring it!"

Intru în casă din gerul de afară. E decembrie, la început. Scot mâncare din pachetul de acasă, niște șnițele, murături, pâine. Încep să mănânc compulsiv, cum fac de fiecare dată. În spatele meu e canapeaua pe care mama și-a petrecut cele 2 săptămâni de după ieșirea din spital. De un cui atârână sistemul improvizat prin care trebuia să-i bag ceai prin tubul din stomac, de 2 ori pe zi. O ață neagră de care stă prins un flacon gol, întors, fără fund, îngălbenit de ceai.

Când am dus-o pe mama “acasă la ea”, sufrageria era plină de flori, gresia din hol strălucea, la fel și rafturile mobilei vechi, pline cu cărți din colecții dichisite. Tata spălase până și geamurile tuturor celor patru camere și două balcoane, se vedeau pe ele urmele cârpei. A stat singur 2 luni. În casă era cald, florile erau pe șemineu, mama l-a luat în brațe: “Mulțumesc, tati! Am crezut că nu mai ajung acasă.” Ei stăteau îmbrățișați în ușa sufrageriei, eu m-am dus în baie să plâng. O bucurie dureroasă.

Șnițelele sunt reci, dar merg bine cu castraveciorii murați. Mama s-a prins de vreo câțiva ani că ăia mici sunt cei mai buni, pentru că sunt mai crocanți. Erau din vara aia, de dinainte de cancer. Ața neagră îmi atârână de suflet, prin gât, se face ghem în capul pieptului. Mă opresc și încep să tremur, dintr-o dată mi-e foarte greu să respir. Mă ridic de la masă și mă așez pe canapea, “trebuia să cedezi și tu cândva”. Mă gândesc că poate ea nu știe ce spune, eu n-am cum să cedez. Dar cedez, da, cedez, iar plămânii mei, ca să primească aer, trebuie să transforme dioxidul de carbon în lacrimi. Nu plâng, doar curg lacrimi. Două luni, Fundeni, mama plângând într-o dimineață, consolată de o asistentă, mama la terapie intensivă, după 7 ore de operație, mama

cu 10 kile mai slabă, mama la primul duș după 2 săptămâni în baia mirosind a căcat, mama târând tuburile după ea pe holul spitalului, mama zvârcolindu-se de durere după ce a mâncat o felie de șuncă pe care i-am dat voie s-o mănânce, mama. Cedează.

Metalul cuștii mele a fost turnat în forme când aveam 17 ani. În ultimii ani, ea s-a tot micșorat, aerul e devenit insuportabil iar pereții din metal zdrăngăne enervant la cea mai mică atingere. Atunci, la 17 ani, am înțeles că a fi “un băiat prins în corp de fată” e lucru’ dracului. Tot atunci, cușca, caldă și rezistentă, a fost sudată ermetic. Am rămas singur, în liniștea metalică, iar a picioarele mele erau singurele două opțiuni posibile: ori mor, ori reușesc; alb sau negru, negru sau alb.

Intrăm în casă în liniște, mă așez pe canapea. Iau o sticlă de apă de sub măsura roșie de la Ikea și beau. Îi pun capacul și o las, canapeaua e curbată la mijloc. Mă uit în jos, spre piept: Parental advisory. Explicit content, un hanorac gri. Prind sticla cu ambele mâini și încep să lovesc cu ea în masă. Vreau să sparg tot. Vreau să n-o sperii pe Alex. Ea înțelege că ăsta-i momentul, momentul de care nu mai pot să trec, și-mi zice: “Hai să facem injecția!”

E dimineață. Soarele de septembrie e blând, nu mai trebuie să dorm în boxeri și nu mă mai trezesc lac de apă. Fac un duș rapid, boilerul mic mă obligă să stau în cabina de duș maxim 7 minute. Îmi pun gel de ras în palmă, iar lama alunecă pe obraji. Nu durează mult, firele de păr sunt răzlețe, dar am strâns de un cioc mic. ăsta-i singurul lucru care mă enervează de un an și 9 luni încoace, că nu-mi mai crește odată barba pe obraji. Am genele lu’ tata, sunt safe,

Și-așa începe euforia. Sunt zeu, sunt cel mai puternic de pe pământ, sunt la un pas să mă duc în vârful Intercontinentalului și să strig că sunt trans; că 11 ani jumate mi-a luat, unșpe nenorociți de ani, dar am făcut-o, băi triștilor, am făcut-o! Ascult obsesiv Rudimental - Free, înot 100 de bazine odată, citesc 6 cărți pe săptămână, alerg o oră fără să mă opresc și am puterea s-o țin pe mama în brațe după sesiunile de chimioterapie și să o asigur că o să fie bine, cu toate că tremură, plânge și refuză să-și dea peruca jos.

Când mă întorc în București, ies în fiecare seară, beau 500 de tărie, agăț, vin acasă către dimineață și mă culc pe jumătatea mea de pat. Resping visceral tot ce ține de vechiul eu, bag toată viața mea de dinainte într-o pungă, îi fac nod și-i fut un șut în eter. Banii s-au terminat repede, dar nu mă gândesc la asta, eu trebuie să mă distrez, să trăiesc. Merit. Nu vreau să muncesc, am muncit mult, mult.

O lună, două, trei, patru. Am prieteni noi. Sasha e acolo permanent, împăciuitor, curios, răbdător și iubitor. Mă cară acasă beat, mă ascultă, împarte cu mine ultimii bani. 5 luni, 6. Încep să mă potolesc, lent, treptat. Nu vreau ca nimeni să mai treacă prin ce-am trecut eu, nu vreau să-l las pe Sasha singur în luptă și înțeleg că am puterea să lupt și eu pentru cei ca mine. O fac. Hăul în care am fost și sentimentul de învingător îmi dau curaj. Simt, cum am intuit întotdeauna, că acum e momentul să lupt și pentru arta mea. Și că arta mea nu poate fi arta mea fără cuvântul "trans" în ea. Sunt atent la toate schimbările, vocea s-a îngroșat, bicepsii au crescut, șoldurile au scăzut. Îmi miros mâinile ciudat, observ asta des, cred că sunt murdar și consum mult săpun. Mai târziu mă prind că ăsta-i noul meu miros. Ies mai ușor cu mașina



din parcările mari, rețin rute, pun informația mai bine cap la cap, descopăr singur cuvântul “extrospecție” și realizez că mă poticnesc când e să le povestesc altora despre asta. Cum dracu’ scot cuvintele din capul meu? Hm. Învăț și realizez că identitatea mea nu e de bărbat, ci de bărbat transgender, nu vreau și n-am de ce să neg asta.

Sunt, în continuare, incapabil să mă dedic unei relații, nici nu vreau și, când cred că vreau, realizez că nu pot. Dar îmi promit solemn că nu mai mint, mi se pare forma supremă de respect. Iubesc și sunt iubit cu forța, dar după 2 zile trebuie să mă întorc la libertatea mea, e dreptul meu inalienabil. Mă întorc și plec iar, distrugând orice apropiere, frumoasă, sinceră. Când rămân singur mi-e dor, când ajung acolo vreau să plec.

“Nu avem voie să lăsăm totul la voia întâmplării, așa cum nu avem voie să ne înecăm. Înoată!” John Fowles – Magicianul, pag. 148 (3 iunie 2005)

Punga se întoarce din eter și cade la picioarele mele. Mă pun în genunchi și o deschid. Un val de remușcare mă lovește fix în față. Acolo sunt eu, familia mea, prietenii mei, a căror dragoste m-a salvat în toți anii ăștia. Mi-e dor de ei, de toți. Mă uit la mine, în pungă, și am senzația, ciudată și înduioșătoare, că am avut o soră geamănă, de existența căreia a depins existența mea. Că a suferit mult, că a muncit mult, că s-a zbatut mult pentru că eu să exist și când eu am început să fiu, ea a încetat să mai existe. Aș vrea să o pot privi în ochi și s-o țin în brațe, să-i mulțumesc și să-i promit ca nimic nu a fost în zadar, că n-o s-o dezamăgesc. Îmi cer iertare pentru ultimele luni.

Am gustul amar al sufletelor pe care le-am făcut să sufere.

n-o să chelesc, chiar dacă linia părului s-a retras într-un W rotunjit. Zâmbesc în oglindă, un prieten mi-a spus de curând că mi s-a schimbat conformația feței, oasele au devenit mai proeminente, fața s-a alungit puțin. Zâmbesc cu toată gura și ochii mi se fac ca la chinezi. Cred că la bătrânețe o să am pungi sub ochi, dar cui îi pasă...

De la știrile RFI învăț cel mai mult. Rețin, astăzi, că pe statul român îl costă, de refugiat, un leu optzeci cazarea pe zi, trei lei mâncarea și șaizeci de bani de buzunar. Păi încearcă tu, futu-ți morții mă-tii, să trăiești o zi cu banii ăștia. Mai am un ou și niște brânză din pachetul de acasă. Când îmi pun ai mei mâncare, trăiesc din ea vreo 2 săptămâni. Sunt îngrijorat pentru mama, muncește mult, se consumă pentru toată lumea, mănâncă ușor anapoda. Cancerul e în ceafa noastră. Pun oul în tigaie, mi-e lene să mai torn și ulei. Pun și brânza, se topește un pic. E suficient, sunt sătul, pâine oricum am uitat să-mi iau.

Atunci când primul ac, cu ultima picătură din primul mililitru de testosteron a ieșit din pielea mea, în ziua aia de iarnă, pereții cuștii de metal au dispărut. Se strânseseră tare în jurul meu, îmi apăseau pe toate oasele. Și când au dispărut, m-am uitat mirat la Alex și în jur. Așteptam ca cineva să-mi taie un cordon care-mi ieșea din buric. Am râs sfios, cu ochii mari și sprâncenele ridicate. That's it? Așa se simte Viața? Wow. Alex stă cu seringă goală în mână și eu știu că nici endocrinoloaga care mi-a zis "Da' de ce vrei să faci asta, că ai fi frumoasă și că fată?", nici endocrinoloaga care nu mi-a mai răspuns la telefon n-au cum să mă mai oprească acum. Nimic nu mă mai poate opri. Nu mai e cale de întoarcere. Niciodată. Pentru nimic în lume.

Revin constant la caietul meu cu citate.

“[...] să nu rănești niciodată inima omului.” Nikos Kazantzakis – Alexis Zorba, pag. 284 (10 ianuarie 2004)

Afară-i cald, chiar dacă a trecut cea mai călduroasă vară înregistrată vreodată. Eu sunt genul cămașă, nu tricou, pe care o las descheiată un nasture în plus. Ce dacă se vede binderul? Mă împac bine cu anatomia mea, nu mai resping nimic din ceea ce ține de mine. Operațiile pot să mai aștepte, eu am multă, multă treabă. Iubesc fiecare zi și sunt recunoscător pentru asta. Sunt recunoscător pentru oul cu puțină brânză, pentru tutun. Nu am nevoie de niciun lucru nou, mi se pare că oricum am prea multe. Cărțile nu sunt niciodată prea multe, mă supăra doar gândul că nu am timp să le citesc pe toate. Sunt recunoscător pentru că gândesc, că pot să practic gândirea care nu judecă pe nimeni. Sunt recunoscător că încep să înțeleg tot mai bine mecanismele sociale, să identific patternurile după care oamenii funcționează, că am capacitatea să înțeleg contextul în care trăiesc și că am puterea să mă revolt. Sunt recunoscător că sunt curios. Sunt recunoscător că oamenii din comunitatea mea îmi sunt prieteni. Sunt recunoscător când împărțim între noi dureri, haine și mâncare. Îmi doresc să intru cu un flex în toate cuștile de metal sigilate ermetic. Trăiesc constant cu frica să nu primesc vestea că vreunul dintre ei a cedat.

Munca mea a devenit prioritatea numărul unu. S-a diferențiat și priorizat în capul meu ce vreau să fac. E timpul să dau înapoi tot ce-am primit. Sărăcia mă învață extrem de multe lucruri, sunt cel mai bogat om de pe pământ.

“[...] și numai puterea naște putere, iată ce nu știi ei[...].” Dostoievski – Crimă și pedeapsă, pag. 175 (18 august 2004)

Dar știu că viața nu mă va lăsa să scap atât de ușor, știu că mă va mai trânti de multe ori. C-așa e viața, oricât aș fi eu de trans-învingător. Dar îi zic în gând, în fiecare dimineață, uitându-mă în oglinda mică din baie: “Hai să te văd!”

# ELAINE, SCOTLAND

**Coming out and finding your own identity is a long process for many people, and it involves as much finding a community to live in, and acceptance and a life. It also involves finding out where are the safe places to be and how to navigate the world as the person you want to become.**

I came to Glasgow after a long period of unemployment and rootlessness. I had just found a job as an environmental consultant; I had just had a fight with my father and left my parents' home, where they had put me up increasingly resentfully for over a year. I had been long-term unemployed, an economic refugee who had been going from place to place and contract to contract for ten years, never able to find a permanent job, and never able to settle in any one place. I was too well educated for any but very specialist jobs, or else it was back to manual work in a factory and by then the cost of rent and food were so high that I couldn't manage that.

Instead, I had found a deal where I would get re-trained in an 'economically valuable' skill, in this case environmental management. Scottish Enterprise paid for me to do a master's degree, and all I had to do was get through it and survive the nagging of my mother, the grumbling of my father, that I

should have a 'real job'. They grew up when a job was for life and a salary could keep a family, and they were not paying attention to the way the world had changed. Why should they? It was simpler to assume that I was not working hard enough, that the son with his head in the clouds was a permanent dependent; a failure.

My parents' view of me was that I always had my nose in a book. I was the reading child. I'm told that I was recognising words before I was ever in school, and my first visit to a library was when I was six. My parents when they were shopping on a Saturday knew that they could leave me and my sister in the local library and we would be safe there, wandering among the books. I grew up going to the library after school, or in the evenings during the summer, and walking home with a book in my hand, reading by the street lights and watching where I was going through my peripheral vision. This is how I constructed myself, rather than having friends, because I had no role models that fit.

Imagine picking up books and never finding in them someone like you. Or if you are in there, you're in a subordinate role, a servant or a victim. Diversity in books is important; representation in stories of women, people of colour, queer people. Whoopi Goldberg tells how important it was to her see Nichelle Nichols on the Enterprise bridge in Star Trek. But imagine this - what if the only people you could find like you in fiction or fact were monsters? Criminals, serial killers, predators? So disgusting that when people found out about you their reactions ranged from shock to vomiting? So outrageous that newspaper editors hounded you to suicide? This is how transgender people were represented to me in

popular culture, from Ace Ventura and The Boxtrolls to Silence of the Lambs; how they are still treated in the Daily Mail and in US legislation. This is where children even now who are unsure of who they are and what their gender is, find the words to talk about themselves: freak; pervert; rapist. It is not coincidence that the attempted suicide rate for trans people is nearly 50%.

Science fiction, on the other hand, asked the question, 'what if?' What if you could change your gender? What if it was a usual thing that nobody remarked on? What if transgender people were just... people? The first instances I ever came across were by Robert Heinlein, in *Time Enough for Love* and *The Number of the Beast*, where it was a possibility to be chatted about and given to a minor character as a therapy, and in *I Will Fear No Evil*, where a rich man found himself in a female body after a brain transplant. In Charles Sheffield's *Sight of Proteus*, people changed their shape all the time and it was just another possibility. Then there was Iain M Banks's *Culture*, where everyone could change sex at will, and did. These were wish-fulfilment scenarios, but the important thing about them was that they were presented as normal. Not a significant part of the story, except for the brain transplant, and that story was more about morality and kindness than about being suddenly female. This trend has continued and more current stories have characters who are engaging and vibrant and have positive agency, and fantasy and SF are becoming welcoming places for trans and non-binary people.

One of the benefits of being the reading kid, and that my parents were aware if bemused that I read 'that science fiction stuff', was that now and again I'd be given books. Often really,

really inappropriate books that nobody examined beyond a glance at the garish covers. One day when I was about fourteen, the minister's wife from across the road gave my mother boxes full of paperbacks that she was clearing from her son's room, he having moved out. This was an adult SF fan's collection from the seventies, the entire New Wave in two crisp boxes, with books like *Dangerous Visions* and authors like Philip Jose Farmer, Michael Moorcock and Roger Zelazny; the experimental work that had been leading speculative literature in that decade and the one before. This was much headier stuff than what I had been reading up until then, socially conservative spaceship fiction from the forties and fifties, and it set my path and held my imagination for years.

The previous owner of the books was Ken MacLeod, who later became a very successful science fiction author himself. While I was unemployed and once again living with my parents, I was in touch with him; he told me that SF fans and writers met on Saturdays in a bar in Edinburgh, and I went along a couple of times. There I found out that there was a writer's group in Glasgow, the Glasgow SF Writer's Circle, which became the centre of my social life once I moved to Glasgow.

Living in Glasgow was an opportunity to explore the city and discover its intricacies. I've enjoyed doing this wherever I have lived, no matter the size of the town. The first thing I did the day I moved to London was to get lost, and I have been getting lost and finding myself in places ever since. The experience of exploring a city is different from just living there. When you live somewhere, you don't pay attention to the places you are walking past, you only pay attention to your



feet to avoid stepping in dog mess. You hustle in the direction of your destination and if you are paying attention at all, it's to the turns that will get you where you're going. Exploring, wandering, though; taking turns and roads because you want to see what's down there, or because you are searching for an experience, a location that you know of but have never been, that's where you can find strange things. The way of it is to not judge, just to take in whatever comes to you. You pay a different, wider kind of attention and the experience is very different. Glasgow rewards that kind of exploration, with a Vietnamese restaurant or a Czech-style teahouse down an alley; a café and artists' and crafts studios in a back lane; a three-storey-high mural on the gable end of a tenement that you glimpse as you cross the road between two chain stores. Pay attention or you'll miss it.

"People Make Glasgow" is the city council's slogan since the Commonwealth Games of 2014 and it's more appropriate than most of the other tartan tat that they came up with for the campaign. The history of Glasgow is in trade and in engineers. James Watt was a technician at Glasgow College when he modified a toy steam engine so that it would work properly, and kick-started the industrial revolution. Engineers and engines have been one of the foundations of Glasgow since then. Large parts of the city have been demolished since that time to make way for a whole new city centre, motorways, malls, but there are still traces to be found of many people's successes, superstitions, joys, sorrows or forlorn hopes, if you know where to look.

In Milngavie, George Bennie developed a propeller-driven monorail that would travel along an overhead track, built

along existing railway lines. Parts of the supports and the test site still exist in the north of Glasgow. Elsewhere in Glasgow you can find a carpet factory based on the Doge's palace in Venice. In Govanhill, the only Egyptian-themed picture house in Britain. The Art Nouveau St Vincent Chambers, known as 'the Hatrack' for the finial at the top of the building looked like a coat stand. The statue of liberty that is watching over George Square from the frontage of the City Chambers. Or if you are looking for a more macabre old Glasgow, there is a preserved skull watching over the Saracen's Head pub from behind the bar, said to be that of Maggie Wall, one of the last witches to be executed in Scotland.

And a wonderful old lady, the Britannia Panopticon. The oldest Victorian music hall still in existence, in her heyday the Britannia Panopticon announced her presence with a first-storey hoarding the length of the building, and the doors led directly into the building from Argyll Street. Bessie Bellwood and Harry Lauder sang there, and it's where Stan Laurel told his first joke. Later in life the music hall was refitted to house a cinema, a carnival and even a zoo. Now you find the entrance down another alley, and the building is being restored, slowly, over a period of decades, supported by love and enthusiasm of the Glasgow cabaret scene and the curator, Judith Bowers, another enthusiast for the hidden sites of Glasgow, will give you tours and tell you the story of the ghost that haunts the pianola.

Settled in Glasgow, and with a new social circle, this was an opportunity to reinvent myself. Conventions, science fiction spaces, fan spaces and writers are often company who are willing to accept people who are different. One of the

first people I ever told about myself was an SF critic, Farah Mendlesohn, who gave me advice that I still follow, “High heels aren’t compulsory.” She also advised me to contact Roz Kaveney, a trans writer, critic and poet, whose advice was invaluable. Conventions were one of the first safe spaces I found where I could try on a woman’s identity for size and see if it fit. This circle of friends was the first group I told, face to face, that I was transgender; first, that I cross-dressed and later that I intended to present as female full-time.

Coming out is a fraught process for anyone. No matter how supportive their immediate family and close friends might be, it is impossible to legislate for acquaintances and strangers. Even more so for a trans person because coming out involves an often drastic change of appearance, mannerisms, social status, even pronouns. It is impossible to hide while settling into the new persona and that in-between state is least acceptable of all among most people. ‘Male’ or ‘Female’ based on appearance and other cues is the first judgement that most people make, even newborns, and mixing those cues is a quick trip to the uncanny valley, that place where features which are almost but not quite right become disturbing.

Among the first of my friends whom I trusted with my news were Helena and Aoife, and the first thing they each said was, “We’re going shopping.” I had a crash course in how women dress and how to choose my clothes to suit my figure, from a personal shopper and a nurse whose shoulders were as broad as my own. My first outing as Elaine in this outfit was to “Brother for a Day”, a cabaret show in the Panopticon, a benefit run by the drag king Diane Torr, which she started in memory of a close friend of hers who had died of AIDS.

Around and about the Panopticon and the other cabaret,

drag and burlesque venues in Glasgow I found another series of safe spaces and accepting people, another hidden map of Glasgow. Burlesque is decried by people who don't understand what is going on as "strippers for hipsters" but it is a scene in which appearance, identity and how you present yourself are all up for grabs. I know many cabaret and burlesque artists who use it to reinvent themselves either completely, or part-time with a matinee at the weekends, and many of them are fans of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, the most camp, queer and gender-mixed SF show ever.

Different places hold different threats, depending on who you are, how you look, who else is there. While I was still transitioning I went up to the bar in a pub on Ashton Lane, to be greeted with, "All right, big man?" from one of the punters. This is what people don't understand, who ask why there is a queer scene - quite apart from the awkwardness of trying to figure out if someone you might fancy could be interested in you, having a place where you can be free from assaults makes life bearable. Assault is not too strong a word, even though it might be the accumulated drip of sniggers and stares, of double-takes and 'sir's when you look for service. It adds up, until each next one has the strength of a blow. I have been lucky. Taunts and shoves, people leaving their seats when I sit near them, and nasty comments that I am meant to hear, are the most extreme that I have ever experienced. I have never been subjected to a beating or hate crime, in part because I have been very careful about where I go, who I talk to, where I am alone.

It doesn't always work. I and my friend Lou were rousted out of a pub toilet because we had felt safe to indulge in that feminine pastime of chattering through the cubicle walls. The

next thing I knew, someone was battering on all the doors and shouting, “there’s a man in the toilets!” The bar manager knew that he was in trouble as soon as I came out, but the damage was done. And not every place that should be safe, is so. The gay scene is no more welcoming of trans people than many straight venues, and the only times I have been sexually harassed or assaulted have been in gay clubs.

My map of Glasgow is coloured in various shades of warnings.

Some places become havens. Biblocafe, Lou’s cafe and secondhand bookshop on Woodlands Road, became in many ways more my home than the places I was living. Like the bar in Cheers, Biblo was as much a community as a location, a perfect example of people making places. My first experience of the place was on one of my first outings as Elaine. Several of my friends had said to me that I must go there, and bookish types from all over Glasgow made it a point to frequent the place. I showed up to meet a friend, cross-dressed and terrified, and the first words that Lou said to me were, “I love your bag!” Over the years as I worked out who I was, we became good friends. She told me at my transition party that she had made it a rule when hiring new staff; she would inform them that she had one customer who was sometimes Bob and sometimes Roberta – names, of course, changed to protect the guilty – and what did the prospective hiree think of that? The ones who sputtered and objected were not hired. The best response Lou ever had was, “Oh, God, does she take a different order?” Cafe staff do like consistent customers.

Among my friends and to writing circles I had become Elaine and I was learning to navigate Glasgow in relative

safety. But this was a double existence – Elaine at home but not at work or to my family. The strain of this was taking up all of my energy. Chronic situations become all-consuming. Pain from an injury or illness, depression, anxiety; or structural problems in your life like an addiction or a relationship that isn't working, or a job you hate but can't leave; any of those is capable of taking up all of your attention until it is all that you can deal with. If you are lucky you might be able to carry on a normal life behind a mask of 'I'm fine!' but even so, when all of your attention is on the problem, there is none left for any but the most basic of obligations.

I didn't realise that this was so for me until it was over. Like many sufferers of chronic ailments, I had become so used to living with dysphoria that I hardly even knew it was there any more. The calculations of loneliness; how can I find a partner when I can't reveal the truth of myself, the lingering consequence of an old partner's abuse that meant that I have stayed single for over twenty years. Performing a role, hiding behind a beard for ten years – Look! I'm a man! really! – and wishing every morning and night that I had been born female. This was my life, until it was not.

I had been going to the writers' circle off and on for ten years by this point and rarely completed a story let alone published anything. Then I came out at work, lined up the bureaucratic hoops to change my identity, and agreed a date to jump through them. Project Elaine, my reconstruction of myself into something I could live with, was nearly over. With that all in place I began to create other things than Elaine; poems first, and more short stories and a screenplay. Novellas and the beginnings of a novel. I have never decided whether,

my goal achieved, my focus was freed for other things, or whether the release from strain that came from finally coming out left me with excess energy which I poured into writing.

In the last year I have had published six short stories and four poems. *High Heels Aren't Compulsory*, the short film which I wrote and which was produced by the queer film group *Lock Up Your Daughters*, has played in film festivals across the country and has been shortlisted for and won festival awards. I have performed poetry on stages in Glasgow and Edinburgh and won a grant from the Scottish Poetry Library and another from Glasgow University. And I co-edited and published *Thirty Years of Rain*, the thirtieth anniversary anthology of the Glasgow SF Writers' Circle.

Where next? The life of any trans person is not easy even without overt harassment and violence. I have no contact with my family since I transitioned, and no job prospects; when I became Elaine I parachuted on to the glass ceiling and besides, the environmental sector has been gutted in recent years. It's easy to escape into wishful thinking, and often that's a trap which leads to dissatisfaction and depression, but perhaps daydreaming for a living is the answer. Neil Gaiman, when asked what he does, says, "I make things up and write them down." There is no shortage of inspiration in the hidden corners of Glasgow from which I can make things up too, and write them down.

# RYLEE, SCOTLAND

**It can be a slow process, to understand yourself, to realise who you are, and then to tell family. For some people, their family are immediately supportive; some people lose their families altogether. Rylee talks here about that process of first understanding themselves, and then getting their family to come to terms with them and accept them.**

I am Rylee.

Living as a newly out trans masculine non- binary person, it has both been invigorating and terrifying. Uplifting and anxiety inducing. I could go on forever but the main thing is I'm comfortable with my gender identity – however my gender dysphoria is a whole different matter. As AFAB (assigned female at birth) I struggle massively with my chest and my feminine body shape. Due to this I've made the decision to venture down the road of testosterone and top surgery although I have yet to receive an initial appointment with a GIC.

Let's go back to the beginning; from a young child I can remember always playing with 'boys' toys, playing football and wanting to be a boy; however I didn't really understand why, apart from the fact I was a tomboy. Through my teens I



realised I had feelings for the same sex and I came out as gay but I still felt very uncomfortable with my gender, however I put this to the back of my mind and continued as my assigned sex at birth. In my early 20's I began wearing male clothing as I felt more comfortable. My mum would comment on this and on one particular occasion she asked if I wanted to be male due to my short hair and masculine clothing, to which I responded no because I tried to bury those feelings for a long time.

Fast forward to 2016 when I began to realise my gender no longer matched my biological sex and I rejected all feminine traits as much as I possibly could. Although I knew deep down I didn't feel like a man. So what was I?

Then I met someone who identifies as non binary and I thought, what the heck, let's ask some questions because you really need these answered. So I had questions about my gender and whether I identified as non binary, which to my amazement I did. To me I feel masculine as opposed to feminine. I bought my first binder and then changed my name to Rylee.

Funny story, I chose that name on a train journey back from Edinburgh Zoo with two options, and for the life of me I cannot remember the other name, so Rylee must have been the best choice.

I first came out to friends at university and slowly people would see things on Instagram but it wasn't time for Facebook to know.

Eventually in October I went up north to see my family to celebrate my birthday, and for me it was my time to come out again. So I did just that. I won't go into too much detail

but it didn't go well and I ended up leaving my mum's house in tears. Come Christmas I was terrified of how things would go but they went smoothly and my brother tried his best to call me Rylee, my Granma got me a pen which had 'doesn't have your name' inscribed on it which for me was a win and then several days into January I got a card from my young cousins to say thank you for their Christmas presents, they addressed it to Rylee. I can't begin to explain the excitement but also the anxiety knowing that all of my close family knew.

Fast forward to the 8th of February when I got a new tattoo on my wrist 'they' which are my pronouns. I took the plunge and posted a coming out status which was liberating yet terrifying. I was leaving myself open for nasty comments and awful judgements, however the whole experience exceeded itself and my mum even commented under the status explaining that 27 years ago she gave birth to her first child and regardless of whether I was they/them, he or she I was still hers ... Reading the full comment I was reduced to tears; finally my mum was accepting me for me.

I wrote an article for the newspaper at the university I attend, for LGBT+ History Month, where I detailed my story of coming out twice; first of all my sexuality, and then my gender. This was posted on social media and my mum read the article. That night I had a phone call from my mum. We were both very emotional and she apologised for upsetting me and called me Rylee for the very first time. She said "I love you, Rylee" at the end of the phone call, and I felt a weight had been lifted off my shoulders but I cried for an hour or so after.

Throughout this whole process my mental health has declined at times. In 2015 I was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder. I have suffered with an Eating Disorder for several years and this is partly related to my gender dysphoria along with comments about my weight from my father as a teen. My depression and anxiety fluctuates, more so when I experience negativity towards my gender, particularly when using bathrooms, however I started using male bathrooms and this has declined. From a teen I have attempted suicide eight times although I'm unsure if this had any relation to my gender identity.

To anyone reading this who is struggling with their gender, embrace who you are, live your life the way you want to. I held back for too long and it affected me deeply.

Stay strong trans siblings.

# SARAH, SCOTLAND

**Loss and loneliness are a risk that trans people take in coming out as themselves, and some people have to find a new home altogether. Sarah writes in this beautiful piece about her journey from having to give up her family, to finding a new home and acceptance.**

*Abide with me, journey with me.*

*Let the goddess fill the glen with mystery.*

*We'll write the story of life and glory*

*On the low road to Kinlochleven*

It is Nick calling me through the headphones from behind his mixing desk. I have just finished singing. I am at Watercolour Music and we have had a long and happy working day recording a new song. As I hang up the headphones and turn my head to the right I catch a glimpse of Ben Nevis on the other side of the water. I am still humming the song. It is called "The Low Road to Kinlochleven". Last night we were performing at the Glencoe Autumn Festival and the musicians have stayed with me overnight. After a short journey on the Corran Ferry across Loch Linnhe here we are in the studio. I have asked everyone to play as if it was their own song, with their own style and be themselves. That's what the lyrics are all about: being oneself. It is the end of the

day and I am sitting next to a silent Nick. His eyes are turned towards his screen. He is arranging a temporary mix so that I can listen to today's work. I look through the window at Inverscaddle Bay and suddenly reality hits me. I am packing up tomorrow to fly to Brighton and spend eight nights in a hospital. I will undergo what is known as sex reassignment surgery. People think I am ecstatic about it. I am not. This should have happened 47 years ago and is well overdue. I am already missing my Highlands.

My name is Sarah and I live in Kinlochleven, a village at the end of a most spectacular glen. Two roads lead to Kinlochleven. One on the South side of Loch Leven offers spectacular views above the water and the Mamore mountains. It is known as the High Road. The other on the North side along the shore is called the Low Road. Sometimes I say that all my life has been about travelling on that beautiful but less visible Low Road while the world was looking for me on the High Road where I was not. I was born 47 years ago with a different name, a boy's name. As far back as I can remember I knew that the identity assigned to me was wrong. It was an unwanted life with an unwanted script and an impossible journey. I am proud today that I have made the journey possible.

I first came to this recording studio two years ago still carrying the burden of my old name. I presented myself to Nick Turner and Mary Ann Kennedy, music directors and owners of the place using that fake persona. I was here to record a new album. When I left after the sessions I did not know when or if I would be back to finish the project. The title was "*In Search of the Celtic Twilight*". Some searching

through a mountain of confusion was definitely needed in my life. I had just been referred to a gender clinic in Exeter. A long and mysterious journey was about to begin. It was a secret I was keeping to myself. I left unfinished tracks behind in the recording studio asking Nick to keep them safe. A few months later a diagnosis of severe gender dysphoria and transsexualism was issued by the doctor. What they call “the transition” was about to begin. I stopped contacting Nick and Mary Ann not knowing what to say to them. I had to face a new reality. I was losing my family. It was too much for them so the conclusion was that I should leave our home if the transition was going ahead. One morning we had our last breakfast together. It was agreed that I was vacating the house before 3pm. As long as there was someone in the house no sign of my “chosen” gender should be visible. I saw my children leave for school for the last time. One of them left me a little bottle of my favourite whisky and a good luck card. More than two years have passed now. I still have not seen her since. I have never felt any resentment towards her. She has not been prepared for this journey and some adults have shown her that rejecting me is an acceptable option. The ignorance of the adults is what infuriates me, not her confusion. I left in the afternoon to a little holiday cottage in North Devon owned by Rebekah one of my former students who had heard about my homelessness and offered it as a temporary shelter. I was still hoping that my family would have a change of heart and I would see them again soon. That did not happen. I had become unwanted, had to be invisible in the community and spare the family from public embarrassment. It did not take long for me to understand

that I had to relocate and start an entirely new life somewhere where I would not have to hide and where people would call me by my name.

Twenty five years ago I first moved to the Scottish Highlands after leaving the cosy prison inside Mum and Dad's house. That Highland dream only lasted a year. The day when I left Scotland I remember saying to myself as I was strolling along the bank of the river in Inverness that something was not quite completed. I would be back one day if something terrible happened to me. The Highlands would look after me. For years I did not miss an excuse to be back. Excuses included skiing, hill walking and more recently music. This time there was something quite special: At Watercolour Music I had left a big part of myself. I finally wrote to Nick and Mary Ann after months of silence. Their reply through an email was prompt and clear.

*"Dear Sarah,*

*What a brave message to send folks and we take this as a mark of trust which we truly appreciate. Please know that we are here for you whenever you are ready to begin the next stage of the album, and that – much more importantly – Watercolour is here for you at all times as a place that is accepting and welcoming in every stage of your new life.*

*Our doors are always open –*

*gabh fois,*

*MA and Nick xx"*

The last two words in Gaelic added something even more touching. I know that for a Gaelic speaker like Mary Ann they are words that come from the heart not from the head. I remember reading the message a dozen times with a few tiny

tears of silent joy and relief rolling down my cheek.

It was time to make the big decision. The doctor in Exeter had warned me against moving to Scotland because a transfer from NHS England to NHS Scotland could be complicated and disrupt my treatment. But he soon understood that this transition was far more than just about gender: The Highlands had shaped my identity and only THEY could distract me from the huge pain of losing my family and my home in the West Country. My therapist at the clinic had also spotted how music and song writing were an essential part of me. Shortly before Christmas I found an advert. There was a house available for renting in the new year in the village of Kinlochleven near Glencoe. So I spent the festive season in various places, sometimes sleeping at friends' on a sofa sometimes back at the cottage when it was available. One morning I decided that there was no reason left for me to stay. Scotland was waiting for me. Rebekah had got up and walked out in the cold to see me off. She gave me a big hug and just said: "don't turn right it is your old life in Cornwall. Turn left and keep driving. A new life is waiting for you in the Highlands. Drive safely." It was very hard to leave that very special woman who had given me a roof at probably the worst and most painful time of my life.

So I drove and drove. I can vaguely remember my last night in England in a Cumbrian guesthouse. The following day I crossed the border and after another few hours behind the wheel old familiar places triggered a feeling of home coming: Tyndrum, Bridge of Orchie, Loch Tulla, Ranoch Moor, Buachaille Etive Mor, Aonach Eagach Ridge, Glencoe and then Loch Leven. The magic had not been altered the



slightest. Every river and peak, was still there waiting for me. I arrived in Kinlochleven and slept at the MacDonald Hotel near the loch. My house was not ready yet. I spent time in temporary accommodation again and then moved to Glasgow for nearly three weeks to work as a volunteer for Celtic Connections the winter music festival. The work consisted of helping artists behind the stage. One evening an Irish musician invited by Arthur Johnstone for a special concert was waiting in a room. He asked me if I played music. When I told him I was a guitarist he passed me his guitar and asked me to play. He called some friends to come and listen. I was petrified when they asked me to sing. I had never sung as Sarah! What about my voice? Fortunately the stage manager appeared and called the owner of the guitar back to the stage. He disappeared and I went back to making coffee and tea. That's all I felt I was good for.

The first evening after the opening concert at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall a huge crowd of artists who had performed gathered behind the stage for a drink. I knew so many from seeing them on TV. It felt as if they knew me and would call me by my "old" name. I was petrified when one of them walked straight to me. I thought he was going to say: "I know who you are, I know what you have done." Sadly this is how you feel at the beginning of a gender transition. You think people all around can read you, spot flaws off you. The man simply shook hands with me and introduced himself as James. He was drummer James MacKintosh. He asked me who I was and where I lived. I had no idea what to say. I was still homeless so I replied without thinking: "Kinlochleven". He was from Fort William. So we talked about Lochaber

and the Corran Ferry which his grand-father used to run in the 1930's. Another evening I was walking around inside the theatre. I was obsessed and could hear voices in my head calling me by my "old" name. Suddenly someone behind me cheerfully and loudly shouted: "SARAH!". It was Mary Ann Kennedy walking around with a BBC team interviewing artists. She walked straight to me, gave me a big hug and introduced me to a couple of friends. I cannot recall what she said. It does not matter. Her message was loud and clear. I was Sarah. Mary Ann once again had pulled me out of a moment of insanity and torment.

By early February I was back in the Highlands but my house was not ready. I still spent time in temporary accommodation. That feeling of homelessness became unbearable until the morning I received a phone call. The house was ready. So I left Fort William. At North Ballachulish I turned left and drove the Low Road to Kinlochleven. It was a beautiful winter day in the glen of Loch Leven. There was snow from the top of the peaks to the shore. I passed the place where once the Ballachulish figure, a 2,500 year old wooden statue representing a Goddess was found buried in the peat near the loch not far from the Isles of Glencoe. Behind me was *Beinn a'Bheithir* the mountain of the Thunderbolt. Indeed I was leaving thunder or perhaps my own anger behind me. A few goldeneyes were drifting on the water. Through the snow I could see water falling down the mountains. At the end of the road there was Kinlochleven and an empty house. Sarah had a home now.

That's nearly two years ago now and I know I will never forget that day. Since then I have timidly started

playing music again. I have finished the album “In Search of the Celtic Twilight”. Entering the studio as Sarah was emotionally draining. I remember falling asleep between takes. Once Nick who normally never makes reference to my story briefly said: “Remember Sarah. Music has no gender.” I launched the album at a poetry festival in Glasgow. The aim was not to make money but just reassure myself that I could still perform. A week before the launch I had my first practice with the musicians in a little room at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. It was a gruelling practice. Several times I was unable to finish the songs and was out of breath. I had to sit many times. Sally the fiddler looked after me and bought me a coffee. On the way back home I stopped by Loch Lomond and cried. I wondered how I would ever stand in front of an audience again and sing. That’s exactly what I did two weeks later as Sarah at the Tron Theatre. I played, sang, told the audience stories and jokes. They laughed and I laughed . The mission had been accomplished. I had convinced myself that Sarah could play music.

Winter came with emotional exhaustion but stronger determination. I used the cold and dark months to rest at home. I had to accept that I was just like a majority of people going through gender reassignment. Depression is a huge part of the journey. Suicidal thoughts are very common in the transgender population. I had to stop lying to myself and think that everything would be OK. I was no exception. On 16 December 2015 my car broke down near Crianlarich as I was driving to Dundee to a medical appointment linked with the gender reassignment process. I had to phone and cancel. An excruciating feeling that the transition would

never succeed filled my head. The car was fixed and all I could do now was drive back to Kinlochleven. Back home I shut all the curtains and stayed in the dark for 24 hours. I switched on my computer and found websites listing the best and easiest ways of ending one's life. I am still shocked today that such materials are so easily available. Some options felt more attractive than others. I fell asleep on the sofa. I woke up 12 hours later in the dark in a cold lounge still wearing my coat. It was 5 o'clock in the morning. I was scared by what I had done and considered. One thought convinced me that it was worth continuing to live. If I died now family members who still misgendered me may get my body back and bury me under my old name. That transition had to be fully completed for that not to happen. Little by little I found reasons to continue the journey. A few days following that horrible moment, I walked out and saw the mountains above Kinlochleven full of beautiful burns. I looked at Loch Leven and thought about the reason why I had come and lived here in the first place. The same evening I walked to the MacDonald Hotel with a pen and my notebook. It was one of those quiet winter evenings in the room they call the Bothy Bar. A bothy was just what I needed after the tumultuous storms I had travelled through. I sat and remembered that winter day I drove the Low Road to my house. I pulled the pen out of my bag and wrote the first lines of the song: The Low Road to KInlochleven.

“Are you ready to listen Sarah?” Nick is ready. In the space of a quiet few minutes he has put together a temporary mix so that I can hear the track for the first time. During that short time I have been somewhere else travelling through

two years of torment. I pause and with a smile answer.  
“Yes I am ready. Play the track”.

*White blankets slope down to the shore.  
It's morning, water glitters through the trees.  
Winter will stay whitening the day.  
From the isles to the ridge of Binnein Mòr.*

*Darkness now lifting, goldeneyes drifting,  
Above the narrows thunder's rumbled through the night  
Water is falling, mountains are calling. |  
It's the low road to Kinlochleven.*

*I'll find a house with empty rooms.  
Light a fire and warm its heart out of the gloom.  
Now I'm alive and I will drive,  
Drive the low road to Kinlochleven.*

*Songs will now no longer feel the same,  
No more room for torment fear and shame.  
From Blackwater to the bridge they all call me by my name.*

*There was a goddess under my feet.  
They stole her wooden body from the peat .  
I'll carve her name on every tree.  
On the low road to Kinlochleven*

*Abide with me, journey with me.  
Let the goddess fill the glen with mystery.  
We'll write the story of life and glory  
On the low road to Kinlochleven.*

Indeed we will write the story of life and glory. When I have recovered I will start writing new songs for an album about the beautiful glen of Loch Leven and its people who have welcomed me without asking questions. It will be called "*It Happened by Loch Leven*".

*Reste avec moi, fais la route avec moi.  
Laissons la déesse remplir la vallée de son mystère  
Et nous écrivons l'histoire, celle de la vie et de la gloire.  
Sur la petite route du bas qui mène à Kinlochleven.*

“C’est bon Sarah. J’ai plusieurs prises. Celle-ci sera sûrement la meilleure”.

C’est la voix de Nick que j’entends dans le casque. Il est assis derrière sa table de mixage. J’ai fini de chanter. Je suis dans le studio d’enregistrement de Watercolour Music et nous venons de passer une longue et belle journée à travailler sur l’enregistrement d’une nouvelle chanson. Alors que je raccroche mes écouteurs et que je tourne mon regard vers la droite, j’aperçois le Ben Nevis de l’autre côté du loch. Je continue à fredonner la chanson. Celle-ci s’appelle “La route du bas qui mène à Kinlochleven”. Hier soir nous avons joué au festival d’automne de Glencoe et les musiciens ont passé la nuit chez moi. Après une courte traversée sur le ferry de Corran nous voici de l’autre côté du loch ici dans le studio. Je leur ai demandé de jouer comme si c’était leur propre chanson, avec leur propre style et de rester eux-mêmes. C’est bien de cela qu’il s’agit si vous écoutez les paroles de la chanson: être soi-même. La journée est finie et me voici assise à côté de Nick. Celui-ci est silencieux. Il a les yeux fixés sur son écran. Il me prépare un mixage provisoire pour que je puisse écouter le travail que nous avons effectué aujourd’hui. Par la fenêtre, je regarde la baie d’Inverscaddie et soudain la réalité me rattrape. Demain je fais mes bagages et je prends l’avion pour Brighton où je passerai huit nuits à l’hôpital. Je vais subir ce qu’on appelle une opération de réattribution sexuelle. Les gens pensent que je suis folle de joie mais cela

n'est pas le cas. C'est pour moi quelque chose qui aurait dû se passer il y a quarante-sept ans et qui n'a que trop tardé. Les Highlands me manquent déjà.

Je m'appelle Sarah et j'habite à Kinlochleven un village perdu au bout d'une vallée spectaculaire. Deux routes mènent à Kinlochleven. L'une est située au sud du loch Leven et offre une vue magnifique sur ce loch. On l'appelle "la route du haut." L'autre située sur la partie nord longe le rivage et est connue sous le nom de "route du bas". Je dis souvent que ma vie a consisté à voyager sur cette belle mais invisible route du bas alors que le monde autour de moi me cherchait sur la route du haut où je ne me trouvais pas. Je suis née il y a quarante-sept ans avec un nom différent, un nom de garçon. D'aussi loin que je me souviens je savais que cette identité qu'on m'avait attribuée ne me convenait pas. C'était une vie et un script dont je ne voulais pas et auxquels s'ajoutait un parcours impossible. Mais aujourd'hui je suis fière. J'ai rendu ce parcours possible.

La première fois que j'ai mis les pieds dans ce studio d'enregistrement c'était il y a deux ans. Je trainais encore le fardeau qu'était mon nom d'autrefois. Je me suis présentée à Nick Turner et Mary Ann Kennedy directeurs musicaux et propriétaires des lieux en utilisant ce faux personnage. Je venais pour enregistrer un nouvel album. Une fois ces séances terminées je suis partie ne sachant pas quand et si je reviendrais pour terminer le projet dont le titre était "In Search of the Celtic Twilight" ce qui signifie "A la recherche du crépuscule celtique". Il y a avait en effet dans ma vie un grand besoin de partir à la recherche de quelque chose. Cette quête était un parcours à travers des montagnes de confusion.



Je venais d'obtenir mon premier rendez-vous dans une clinique d'identité du genre à Exeter. Un long et mystérieux parcours allait commencer. C'était un secret que je gardais. Je suis partie laissant dans ce studio des enregistrements pas finis et ai demandé à Nick d'en prendre bien soin. Un mois plus tard le médecin prononçait un diagnostic de "forte dysphorie de genre" et de transsexualisme. Ce qu'on appelle la transition allait commencer. J'ai cessé alors de contacter Nick et Mary Ann ne sachant pas quoi leur dire. Il fallait affronter une autre réalité: je perdais ma famille pour qui toute cette histoire devenait trop lourde et la conclusion était qu'il fallait que je parte si cette transition devait avoir lieu. Un matin nous avons pris notre dernier petit déjeuner ensemble. Nous nous étions mis d'accord que je devais quitter la maison avant trois heures de l'après-midi. Tant qu'il y avait quelqu'un d'autre que moi dans la maison, je ne devais pas laisser la moindre trace visible du genre que j'avais "choisi". J'ai vu mes enfants partir pour la dernière fois à l'école. L'une d'elles m'a laissé une petite bouteille de mon whisky préféré accompagnée d'une carte dans laquelle elle me souhaitait bonne chance. Depuis plus de deux années se sont écoulées et je ne l'ai toujours pas revue. Je n'ai jamais ressenti la moindre rancœur à son égard. C'est une épreuve pour laquelle elle n'a jamais été préparée et certains adultes lui ont montré que le rejet était un choix acceptable. C'est l'ignorance des adultes ce qui me rend folle de rage, pas la confusion dans laquelle elle se trouve. Je suis partie dans l'après-midi et me suis rendue vers une petite maison dans le nord du Devon que Rebekah une de mes anciennes étudiantes qui en était propriétaire me proposait provisoirement sachant que je n'avais plus

de toit. J'espérais encore qu'il y ait un revirement dans ma famille, que le coeur l'emporterait et que je les reverrais très vite, mais en vain. J'étais devenue indésirable et il fallait que là où nous avons vécu ensemble je devienne invisible pour que ma famille soit épargnée de l'embarras que je représentais. Il ne m'a pas fallu longtemps pour comprendre qu'il fallait que je parte vivre ailleurs pour recommencer une nouvelle vie, quelque part où je n'aurais pas à me cacher et où on m'appellerait par mon nom.

Il y a vingt-cinq ans, je suis venue vivre dans les Highlands pour la première fois après avoir quitté la petite prison bien confortable construite dans la maison de papa et maman. Le rêve des Highlands n'a duré qu'un an. Le jour où j'ai quitté l'Ecosse je me souviens m'être dit alors que je me promenais le long de la rivière à Inverness qu'il restait quelque chose d'inachevé. Un jour je reviendrais s'il m'arrivait quoi que ce soit de terrible. Les Highlands me prendraient sous leur protection. Pendant des années les excuses pour justifier des visites n'ont pas manqué, qu'il s'agisse d'activités de montagne, de ski et plus récemment de musique. Mais cette fois ci quelque chose de très spécial s'ajoutait: à Watercolour Music j'avais laissé une grande partie de moi-même. Je me décidai alors à écrire à Nick et Mary Ann après des mois de silence. Leur réponse sous forme de mail fut rapide et claire.

*“Chère Sarah,*

*Quel courage que d'envoyer un tel message et nous le recevons comme un signe de confiance pour laquelle nous te sommes vraiment reconnaissants. Il faut que tu saches que nous serons présents ici pour toi quel que soit le moment venu où tu seras prête à entamer la phase suivante de cet*

*album. Mais avant tout, et c'est ce qu'il y a de plus important, Watercolour sera toujours ici pour toi un lieu qui t'acceptera et t'accueillera dans toutes les étapes de ta nouvelle vie.*

*Notre porte te sera toujours ouverte.*

*gabh fois,*

*MA et Nick”*

Ces derniers mots en gaélique ajoutaient quelque chose de plus touchant. Je sais que pour ces gens comme Mary-Ann dont le gaélique est la langue maternelle, ces mots ne viennent pas de la tête mais du cœur.

Le temps de la grande décision était venu. Le médecin à Exeter m'avait déconseillé de déménager en Ecosse de peur qu'un transfert du système de santé anglais vers celui de l'Ecosse soit compliqué et vienne interrompre mon traitement. Mais il a vite compris que cette transition ne se limitait pas à l'identité de genre. Les Highlands avaient façonné mon identité. Seules les Highlands pouvaient détourner mon esprit de cette souffrance que je ressentais en perdant ma famille, ma maison et le West Country où j'habitais. La psychologue qui me suivait à la clinique avait également remarqué à quel point la musique et écrire des chansons faisaient intégralement partie de moi. Peu de temps avant Noël je trouvai une petite annonce. Il y avait une maison à louer dans le village de Kinlochleven près de Glencoe. Je passai donc les fêtes de fin d'année dans divers endroits, parfois dormant sur un canapé chez des amis, d'autre fois dans la petite maison de Rebekah lorsque celle-ci était disponible. Un matin je compris qu'il n'y avait plus de raison à ce que je reste: l'Ecosse m'attendait. Rebekah s'était levée et était dehors dans le froid pour me dire au revoir. Après une

longue étreinte elle prononça ces quelques mots: “En sortant de la cour, ne tourne pas droite. Ça mène en Cornouailles, ton passé. Tourne à gauche, continue et ne t’arrête pas. C’est une nouvelle vie qui t’attend dans les Highlands. Bon voyage”. Il fut bien difficile de me séparer de cette femme si exceptionnelle qui m’avait offert un toit probablement à un des moments les plus douloureux de ma vie.

Alors j’ai conduit des kilomètres et des kilomètres. Je me souviens de ma dernière nuit en Angleterre dans une chambre d’hôte dans le Cumbria. Le lendemain je passais la frontière et après quelques heures au volant, des lieux qui m’étaient familiers firent naître en moi le sentiment d’être arrivée chez moi: Tyndrum, Bridge of Orchie, Loch Tulla, Ranoch Moor, Buachaille Etive Mor, Aonach Eagach Ridge, Glencoe et enfin le loch Leven. La magie de l’endroit n’avait en rien été altérée. Chaque rivière et chaque sommet étaient encore là et ils m’attendaient. Je suis arrivée à Kinlochleven et j’ai dormi à l’hôtel MacDonald près du loch. Ma maison n’était pas encore prête, Je me suis retrouvée de nouveau à dormir dans des logements provisoires et suis alors partie à Glasgow pour presque trois semaines où j’ai travaillé comme bénévole pour Celtic Connections le festival de musique d’hiver. Le travail consistait à assister les artistes dans les coulisses. Un soir un musicien irlandais invité par Arthur Johnstone à l’occasion d’un concert exceptionnel attendait dans une pièce. Il m’a demandé si je jouais de la musique. Lorsque je lui ai dit que j’étais guitariste il m’a passé sa guitare et m’a demandé de jouer. Il a appelé certains de ses amis pour qu’ils viennent écouter. La peur m’a envahie lorsqu’ils m’ont demandé de chanter. Sarah n’avait encore jamais chanté! A

quoi ressemblerait ma voix? Heureusement la régisseuse est apparue et a appelé celui qui me prêtait cette guitare. Il fallait qu'il entre en scène. Il a disparu et je suis retournée préparer des thés et des cafés. C'est tout ce que j'étais capable de faire.

Le premier soir après le concert d'ouverture au Glasgow Royal Concert Hall une énorme foule d'artistes qui s'étaient produits se retrouvèrent dans les coulisses pour prendre un verre. J'en connaissais beaucoup les ayant vus à la télévision. J'avais comme l'impression qu'ils me connaissaient et qu'ils m'appelleraient par mon "ancien" nom. Je fus saisie de peur lorsque l'un d'entre eux vint droit vers moi. Je croyais qu'il allait me dire: "Je sais qui tu es. Je sais ce que tu as fait". C'est triste mais c'est ce que vous ressentez lorsque vous entamez votre transition de genre. Vous croyez que tous les gens autour de vous devinent ce qui vous est arrivé et détectent toutes ces petites failles qui vous trahissent. Mais non. Il n'en fut rien de tout cela. Cet homme me serra la main et se présenta; il s'appelait James. C'était le batteur James MacKintosh. Il me demanda qui j'étais et où j'habitais. Je ne savais vraiment pas quoi répondre. J'étais encore sans adresse alors je répondis sans réfléchir: "Kinlochleven". Il était de Fort William. Alors nous avons parlé du Lochaber et du ferry de Corran que son grand-père dirigeait dans les années 30. Un autre soir je me promenais dans le théâtre poursuivie par une obsession. J'entendais des voix qui dans ma tête m'appelaient par mon "ancien" nom. Soudain j'entendis derrière moi crier haut et fort une voix pleine d'enthousiasme: "SARAH!" C'était Mary Ann Kennedy qui faisait des allers et venues avec une équipe de la BBC pour interviewer des artistes. Elle se dirigea droit vers moi et après une étreinte chaleureuse me

présenta à quelques amis. Je ne me rappelle pas ce qu'elle dit. Peu importe. Elle l'avait bien crié haut et fort: j'étais Sarah. Une fois de plus Mary Ann m'avait sortie d'un instant de tourment infernal.

Au début du mois de février j'étais de retour dans les Highlands mais ma maison n'était pas prête. Je passai encore du temps dans des logements provisoires. Ce sentiment d'être sans foyer devenait insupportable jusqu'au matin où je reçus un coup de téléphone. La maison était prête. Alors je quittai Fort William. A North Ballachulish je tournai à gauche et suivis la route du bas qui mène à Kinlochleven. C'était une belle journée d'hiver dans la vallée du loch Leven. Il y avait de la neige du sommet des montagnes jusqu'au rivage. Je passai devant l'endroit où une statue en bois de 2500 ans représentant une déesse avait été découverte enfouie dans la tourbe près du loch, pas loin des îles de Glencoe. Derrière moi se trouvait Beinn a Bheitir, la montagne de la foudre. En effet c'était bien le tonnerre que je laissais derrière moi ou peut-être ma propre colère. Sur l'eau du loch quelques garrots à œil d'or flottaient à la dérive. A travers la neige j'apercevais des cascades sur les flancs des montagnes. Au bout de cette route il y avait Kinlochleven et une maison vide: Sarah avait enfin un toit.

Depuis Presque deux années se sont écoulées et je sais que je n'oublierai jamais ce jour. J'ai timidement recommencé à jouer de la musique. J'ai terminé l'album "In Search of the Celtic Twilight". Entrer dans le studio, cette fois en tant que Sarah, fut un exercice épuisant émotionnellement. Je me souviens m'être endormie entre les prises. Il y eut un moment où Nick, qui ne mentionne jamais mon histoire, me dit très

brièvement en passant. “N’oublie pas une chose Sarah, la musique ça n’a pas de genre”. Je lançai l’album à un festival de poésie à Glasgow. Le but n’était pas me faire de l’argent mais juste me rassurer que je savais toujours jouer. Une semaine avant le lancement, je m’étais rendue à une première répétition avec les musiciens dans une salle du Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Cette répétition avait été un exercice exténuant. Plusieurs fois je n’avais pas réussi à finir les chansons et m’étais retrouvée à bout de souffle. Sally la violoniste avait été très attentionnée à mon égard et m’avait acheté un café. Au retour je m’étais arrêtée le long du Loch Lomond et j’avais pleuré. Je me demandais bien comment j’allais affronter un public à nouveau et chanter. C’est exactement ce que Sarah fit deux semaines plus tard, au Tron Theatre de Glasgow. Mission accomplie. J’étais convaincue que Sarah pourrait toujours jouer.

L’hiver arriva amenant avec lui une fatigue émotionnelle mais également une détermination plus intense. J’utilisai cette période de l’année sombre et froide pour me reposer chez moi. Je devais accepter que j’étais comme toutes les personnes qui affrontent la procédure de réattribution du genre. La dépression fait partie du parcours. Les pensées suicidaires sont très courantes chez les personnes transgenres. Il fallait que je cesse de me mentir et que j’arrête de croire que tout irait bien. Je n’étais en aucun cas une exception. Le 16 décembre 2015 ma voiture tomba en panne près de Crianlarich alors que je me rendais à un rendez-vous médical à Dundee dans le cadre de cette procédure de transition. Je dus téléphoner et annuler. Ma tête fut envahie par un sentiment atroce que cette transition n’aboutirait jamais.

Une fois la voiture réparée, tout ce que je pouvais faire était de rentrer à Kinlochleven. De retour à la maison je fermai les rideaux et restai dans l'obscurité pendant 24 heures. J'allumai mon ordinateur et trouvai des sites sur Internet qui énuméraient les meilleures méthodes et les plus faciles pour mettre fin à ses jours. Je suis toujours choquée aujourd'hui en pensant que de telles informations puissent être si facilement accessibles. Certaines options me paraissaient plus attirantes que d'autres. Je m'endormis sur le canapé et me réveillai douze heures plus tard dans l'obscurité. Il faisait froid dans le salon. Je n'avais pas enlevé mon manteau. Il était cinq heures du matin. J'étais effrayé par ce que je venais de faire et par ce à quoi j'avais songé. Mais il y eut une pensée qui parvint à me convaincre qu'il fallait continuer à vivre. Dans ma famille on persistait à parler de moi au masculin et si je mourrais on récupérerait mon corps et on m'enterrerait sous mon ancien nom. Il fallait que j'aille jusqu'au bout de cette transition pour empêcher que cela n'arrive. Petit à petit, je retrouvai des raisons qui m'aidaient à penser qu'il fallait continuer à vivre. Quelques jours après cet horrible incident je sortis marcher et vis les montagnes recouvertes de belles cascades. Je regardai le loch Leven et me mis à penser à ces raisons qui m'avaient amenée vivre ici. Le soir même j'allai à l'hôtel MacDonald emportant avec moi un stylo et mon carnet. C'était l'une de ces soirées d'hiver dans la salle qu'ils appellent le Bothy Bar, ce qui signifie, le bar du refuge. Un refuge était exactement ce dont j'avais besoin après ces tumultueuses tempêtes que j'avais traversées. Je m'assis et me souvins du jour où je suis arrivée en voiture sur cette route du bas qui m'avait conduite jusqu'à ma maison. Je sortis un stylo de mon sac et j'écrivis



les premières lignes de la chanson “La route du bas qui mène à Kinlochleven”.

“Tu es prête Sarah?” Nick lui est prêt. En l’espace de quelques minutes il a arrangé un mixage provisoire pour que je puisse entendre la chanson enregistrée pour la première fois. Pendant ce temps j’étais ailleurs et j’ai survolé deux années de souffrance. Je marque une pause puis avec un sourire je lui réponds: “Oui je suis prête. Vas-y. J’écoute”.

*Une blancheur recouvre les pentes jusqu’au rivage  
C’est le matin et l’eau scintille entre les arbres  
L’hiver est installé, la journée sera blanche  
Des îles de Glencoe aux crêtes de Binnein Mór.*

*La nuit se dissipe. Des garrots aux yeux d’or flottent  
à la dérive.  
Au-dessus du goulet le tonnerre a grondé toute la nuit.  
Les eaux descendent, les montagnes m’appellent.  
C’est bien la petite route du bas, celle qui  
mène à Kinlochleven.*

*Je trouverai une maison aux pièces vides  
J’allumerai un feu pour réchauffer son cœur si sombre.  
Maintenant je suis vivante et je poursuis ma route,  
Cette petite route du bas qui mène à Kinlochleven*

*Les chansons ne seront plus comme avant.  
Il n’y aura plus de place pour la honte et le tourment.  
Du lac de Blackwater jusqu’au pont  
Je les entends. Ils m’appellent tous par mon nom.*

*Dans la tourbe sous mes pieds gisait une déesse.  
Son corps tout fait de bois a été dérobé.  
Mais moi je graverai son nom sur tous les arbres  
Sur cette petite route du bas qui mène à Kinlochleven*

*Reste avec moi, fais la route avec moi.  
Laissons la déesse remplir la vallée de son mystère  
Et nous écrivons l'histoire, celle de la vie et de la gloire.  
Sur la petite route du bas qui mène à Kinlochleven.*

C'est bien l'histoire de la vie de sa gloire que nous allons écrire. Quand je me serai remise je commencerai à écrire de nouvelles chansons pour un album qui parlera de la vallée du loch Leven, et de ses habitants qui m'ont accueillie sans me poser de question. Je l'appellerai: "*It happened by Loch Leven*", ce qui signifie "*C'est arrivé sur les bords loch Leven*".

# KENNETH, RUSSIA

**For many members of the Adam World Choir, their creativity is a way to express the self that they are not able to portray in the country where they live. Kenneth writes here about living in Russia, a musician before he ever had access to instruments, writing a novel he won't ever be able to publish where he lives.**

My name is Kenneth. I live in Russia, in the city of Moscow. Why do I want to tell you about myself? I'm guessing you're interested in learning about the lives of transgender people in Russia, a place of modern-day medievalism and obscurantism. No, this is not about politics. Honourable readers, if only for a time I'm simply inviting you to plunge into my world where life, belief in yourself and in the inevitable victory of harmony and the good prevail.

So I'm a non-op FTM. Naturally, I would love to transition, but for reasons beyond my control, this is not possible. And yet, ladies and gentlemen, look at the photos of me. For 16 years I've wanted to have the outer appearance of the person I feel inside.

When I was a child I was into sports games and loved playing football. However, I could turn down a walk and instead dedicate my free time to reading. I have many favourite

writers. However, let me be brief and limit myself to saying that I love English literature and am particularly captivated by the character and works of Oscar Wilde. In a sense, I would call myself an aesthete and a hedonist. OK, so what's next?

A couple of years ago I taught myself English. Now I can read books and watch films in English. Unfortunately, I don't get to practice speaking but it's not a problem. I'm confident that in time this gap will be successfully filled.

Since childhood, I've been engrossed in the world of music. When other children were crying because they didn't get the toys they wanted I was sad only because I didn't have a guitar. One day my mother bought me a guitar and soon I was strumming and singing my own songs. And there was more. My heart would start beating anxiously whenever I heard the rhythm of percussion. I felt those instruments and myself as a single whole. And eventually, diving into this world of bright sounds, I started to teach myself drums. Oh, ladies and gentlemen, you're probably thinking that I had a real drum kit. No. I was learning to play on chairs and pillows. I made drumsticks and eventually decided to learn from cult drummer Jonathan Moffett. He was part of Madonna's touring band. To this day I'm grateful for the help that, unbeknownst to themselves, they gave me in mastering my percussion skills. I was 11 years old. At the age of 21, when I got a place at percussion faculty of a music college, it turned out that all I had to learn was musical notation. Why? Because in terms of performance I was already at a sufficiently high level. I can say that those four years of study were the golden period of my life. I played in brass and folk orchestras and had solo shows. As a reminder of that blissful time, I have video recordings of

my solo performances.

It's worth noting that during my time at the music college, there was an attempt to correct my left-handed playing. I'm left-handed and still play drums in this way. I can describe my life in my own aphorism: "Adult life is just childhood armour and bare essence before old age." The fact that I was born in the wrong body is summed up by a character from my novel "Tailor's witch". This character is called Gossip. He is a mischievous, crafty but wise demon. Into his mouth I invested this ironic statement: "Somehow I wasn't born quite right and my whole life went wrong somewhere." For if you put creativity to one side, my entire life reminds me of a constant struggle for the right to be myself. Maybe I'm a rebel. Maybe I'm the person who wants to be rather than just to seem.

After graduating from the music college I played in various bands. Once, in December 2004, I performed in a band at an LGBT nightclub. There were a few other things but it's important to note that I have remained a solo musician.

I have always been bursting with creative energy. When I was 15 I was part of a theatre group. Even at that time, I had a solid grounding as a solo performer. I enjoyed creating one-man theatre shows, reading stories and changing voices. I can easily bring to life a grumbling patriarch, a noble youth, or a raging man just by using my voice. Excuse my joke: "I maybe one but behind me is an invisible crowd."

If someone asked me: "Is there a song that fully epitomises you and your life? I would reply: "Yes. Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen."

Four years ago I met a person on the Internet, who left Russia for America in the early noughties. The tempestuous

melodies of the soul brought about by our conversations suggested that at last, I had met someone, with whom I could happily sit by the fire or fight the impossible odds.

We had been meeting for three years. I only saw him three times because he only visited Moscow once a year. Even that was enough to live through those times feeling both happiness and sadness all at once. And I had something to be sad about because he wasn't free and had been married for over 16 years. Conversations about divorcing his husband and forever tying his life with me lead to one conclusion: "Not yet."

Like a devoutly monogamous person I was only thinking of him, and these strange relations have resulted in something wonderful. Our correspondence and our passionate romance incited in me a desire to write a novel about a youth unconditionally in love with his master, Duke Yorshane.

The novel takes place in the 14th century. I was writing it whilst listening to Tchaikovsky's greatest, 6th Symphony. You can say I created an algorithm of the symphony of words. In those moments I wasn't just alive, I was resurrected!

I won't be able to publish this novel in Russia but I'm not giving up. Everything has its time. The young protagonist of my novel is called Kenneth, and in a way, I was writing about myself. On this basis, I know that one of the most important events of my life has taken place: I've heard the beating of my heart through the prism of characters of my own creation.

This has allowed me to discover a wonderful world of knowledge, and doubtless because of this, I was overjoyed to read about the National Theatre of Scotland's invitation to take part in The Adam World Choir.

The story of Adam struck the depths of my soul. I think this

young man is a paradigm of courage and willpower. Born in a religious country, he didn't lose his "self". Tested by so much suffering, he opened up the way for all transgender people through music and singing. In essence, The Adam Choir is the entirety of our souls. In this project, everyone sings not for themselves but for everybody. It is a unity of souls, a harmony of hearts and a possibility, if only for a moment, of creating a pure and holy humane world.

Because of this, my heart and my soul are already deeply connected with all participants of The Adam World Choir. And now, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your attention and patience, and wish all the best!

Yours,  
Kenneth Selford

Я Кеннет, страна Россия, город Москва.

Почему я хочу поведать о себе? Полагаю, что вам будет интересно узнать о том, как трансгендерные люди живут в России, являющейся символом современного средневековья и обскурантизма.

Нет, речь не пойдет о политике. Просто я приглашаю вас, уважаемые читатели, хотя бы на время окунуться в мой мир, где превалирует жизнь, вера в себя и в то, что гармония и добро обязательно победят.

Итак, я ФТМ поп-ор. Безусловно мне хотелось бы совершить транссексуальный переход, но по некоторым не зависящим от меня причинам, этого сделать невозможно.

Но посмотрите, как я выгляжу на фотографиях. За 16 лет, я захотел стать внешне тем, кем внутри себя ощущаю.

Я должен признаться в том, что за эти годы я «потерял» многих друзей и знакомых. Теперь я совершенно один. Почему так получилось? По большей части, мои знакомые оказались лояльны действующему в России режиму. Даже некоторые представители ЛГБТ были рады обмануться и делать вид, что здесь все замечательно. Они не понимают, что соглашаясь с путинским режимом, они становятся соучастниками новоявленного фашизма: ксенофобии, гомофобии и трансфобии.

Со своей стороны я не терплю лжи. Мне противно и мерзко от того, что я живу в стране процветающего фашизма. И пусть я остался один, но со своей гуманной позицией. Мои так называемые друзья предпочли барахтаться в пучине действующей диктатуры. Сам я морально задыхаюсь и ищу возможность когда-нибудь отсюда уехать. Навсегда. А пока испытывая подобные



чаяния, я поведаю о себе. Итак, начну с детства.

В детстве я был очень спортивным в плане игр и обожал играть в футбол. Вместе с тем, я мог отказаться от прогулки и посвятить свободное время чтению книг. У меня есть много любимых авторов, но позвольте быть тут кратким и ограничиться повествованием о том, что до сих пор я люблю читать английскую литературу, особенный восторг у меня вызывает личность и творчество Оскара Уайльда. В какой-то степени, я могу сказать о себе, что я – эстет и гедонист. Ну что, пойдете дальше?

Пару лет тому назад я самостоятельно освоил английский язык. Теперь я могу читать в оригинале англоязычные произведения и смотреть фильмы. К сожалению, у меня отсутствует разговорная практика. Но это не проблема! Я уверен в том, что и этот пробел я успешно заполню.

С детства я растворялся в мире музыки. Когда вокруг меня дети могли зареветь из-за того, что им не купили те игрушки, которые они хотели, я переживал только из-за одного: у меня нет гитары! Но однажды мама купила мне гитару и вскоре я уже брэнчал на ней, распевая песни собственного сочинения.

А дальше – больше. Мое сердце начинало трепетно биться, когда я слышал ритм ударных инструментов. Было ощущение, что ударные и я – это единое целое. И наконец влившись в этот мир ярких звуков, я начал самостоятельно учиться играть на ударных.

Вы, наверное, думаете, что у меня была настоящая ударная установка? Отнюдь – нет. Я учился играть на стульях и подушках. Даже смастерил барабанные палочки

и наконец, решил учиться игре у культового барабанщика Джонатана Моффета.

Он играл в концертных турах у Мадонны и я до сих пор мысленно их благодарю за помощь, которую они сами того не ведая, оказали мне в освоении владением на ударных инструментах.

Мне было 11 лет, а когда в 21 год я поступил на ударное отделение в музыкальную школу, выяснилось, что мне нужно лишь выучить нотную грамоту. Почему? Да потому что в плане игры на ударных, я оказался на нужной высоте.

Отучившись там четыре года, я могу сказать, что это был «золотой период моей жизни». Я играл в духовом и народном оркестрах, и были у меня сольные выступления. Как напоминание о той благодатной поре, у меня остались видеозаписи сольных выступлений.

Стоит заметить, что во время учебы в музыкальной школе, меня пытались переучить. Я – левша и по-прежнему так и играю на ударных инструментах.

Свою жизнь я могу охарактеризовать собственным афоризмом:

«Взрослая жизнь лишь панцирь детства и оголенная сущность перед старостью». А тот факт, что я родился не в своем теле, я характеризую фразой своего персонажа из написанного мною романа «Ведьма портного». Этого персонажа зовут Gossip. Это шаловливый, лукавый, но вместе с тем мудрый бес. В его уста я вложил ироническое высказывание:

«Что-то я как-то не так родился и вся моя жизнь пошла куда-то не туда».

Ибо если оставить в стороне мое творчество, то вся

моя жизнь напоминает сплошную борьбу за право быть самим собой. Наверное, я бунтарь. Но и, наверное, я тот, кто хочет быть, а не казаться.

После окончания музыкальной школы я периодически играл в различных группах. Однажды в декабре 2004 года я выступил с некой группой в ночном клубе для представителей ЛГБТ. Что-то было еще, но, пожалуй, правильнее мне будет заметить, что я так и остался сольным музыкантом.

Во мне всегда бурлила творческая энергия. В 15 лет я занимался в театральной студии. Уже тогда за моей спиной был неплохой багаж чтеца. Мне нравится создавать «театр одного актера», читая с актерской подачей литературное произведение и меняя при этом голоса.

Выдать с помощью голоса ворчливого старика, или благородного юношу или разъяренного чем-то мужчину, при чтении книги и соответствующего момента, для меня не проблема. Позвольте тут пошутить:

Я-то один, но за мной невидимая толпа».

Если бы меня спросили:

«Существует ли на свете песня, полностью характеризующая тебя и твою жизнь?» Я бы ответил:

«Да. Это песня группы Queen Bohemian Rhapsody».

Четыре года тому назад я познакомился через Интернет с человеком, в начале нулевых годов переехавшим из России в Америку. Волнительные напевы души при общении с ним, подсказали мне, что я наконец-то встретил того, с кем хотел благодатно сидеть у камина или преодолевать всевозможные препятствия.

Мы встречались три года. Я видел его всего лишь три

раза, ибо он приезжал в Москву раз в год. Но и этого было достаточно для того, чтобы проживать ту пору с ощущением счастья и грусти одновременно.

И мне было отчего грустить, ибо он – не свободен и состоит в браке уже более 16 лет. Разговоров о том, чтобы ему развестись со своим мужем и связать навсегда свою жизнь со мной сводились лишь к одному:

Еще не время».

С этими странными отношениями, когда я как истовый однолюб думал только о нем, произошло кое-что удивительное. Наше общение и наш страстный роман породил во мне желание написать роман о юноше, безграничном влюбленном в своего хозяина, герцога Йоршана.

Действие романа происходит в 14 веке, и я создавал его под величайшую 6-ю симфонию Чайковского. Можно сказать, что я сотворил алгоритм симфонии слов. И в те моменты я не жил! Я – воскресал!

Этот роман я не смогу опубликовать здесь в России. И все-таки я не отчаиваюсь. Всему свое время. Юношу моего романа зовут Кеннет и в какой-то степени я написал о себе. И исходя из этого факта, я знаю, что свершилось одно из важных событий в моей жизни: я услышал биение своего сердца через призму созданных мною образов.

Это позволило мне открыть удивительный мир познаний и поэтому недаром я обрадовался, когда прочитал о том, что Национальный Театр Шотландии приглашает принять участие во Всемирном Хоре Адама.

История Адама поразила меня до глубины души. Я считаю, что этот юноша является примером мужества

и силы воли. Родившись в религиозной стране, он не потерял свое «я». Более того, Адам пройдя тяжелый путь испытаний, смог открыть путь всем трансгендерным людям с помощью музыки и хора.

Ибо Хор Адама – это по сути единое целое наших душ. В этом проекте каждый поет не за себя, а за всех. Это единение душ, гармония сердец и возможность сделать этот мир хотя бы на какое-то мгновение чистым и святым с гуманной точки зрения.

Поэтому мое сердце и моя душа уже глубоко связаны со всеми участниками Всемирного Хора Адама.

А теперь дамы и господа, я благодарю вас за оказанное вами внимание и терпение и желаю вам всех благ!

Ваш Кеннет.

# DANIELA, PORTUGAL

**Non-binary people are still less well-understood than binary ‘male’ or ‘female’ trans people and it can be difficult to deal with prejudice from several different directions, with being trans, non-binary, pansexual and having mental health issues. Daniela, through dealing with these struggles, has found the courage and strength to work for the benefit of other LGBT+ people.**

My name is Daniela Filipe Bento, I’m 31 years old and Portuguese. I am a software engineer and a student of astrophysics and astronomy and I am also a woman, trans, non-binary, pansexual and relationship anarchist. My process of identity discovery has been long - to the extent that my personal abilities have allowed it. However, I am proud of that path.

I come from a small and religious area, and therefore, access to information on non-normative identities was limited. In fact, I only got to concretely know what the term “trans” meant when I was 25 years old – a few years after I went to live in the capital. However, since I was 18, I was already known by my female name in certain circles – although I felt that I did not fit into a gender binary from very early on (but without the language to speak of it).

The causes and consequences of this time of discovery are numerous and circular, on the one hand I was discovering myself, on the other hand I was fighting against my bipolar crisis, it was a huge challenge.

One of my biggest dilemmas was how to talk about this subject with the people who were close to me. How could I explain it? Information on gender identity is scarce in Portugal and, as a consequence, transphobia is fairly common. However, finding a word that described what I felt was of enormous importance to find my own position in the world. There was a community that I could belong to. I was not alone. This is, undoubtedly, the greatest gratification that you can have: finding people like you, who experience the same issues as you do. The same pain, the same difficulties, the same joys.

It was in 2014 that I decided to change my name. In Portugal a diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder is still needed to have access to legal name change, and this process took about two years, a real difficulty when trying to make my life's foundations as stable as possible. But the challenges were not limited to the clinical process; it permeated the experience of my daily life.

As a trans person, the violence that is experienced is immense and happens in several layers of our lives. Institutional transphobia (in security, health, education, etc.), micro-aggressions normalised by society and explicit violence against people of non-normative identities. In my personal case I conjugate the facts of being a woman, being trans, being non-binary, being pansexual and being a relationship anarchist – I have lost count of the multiple

discriminations in my daily life. I believe, however, that this is a structural and cultural problem.

I've faced many challenges in my own family, to see my identity recognised, to feel respected and, fortunately, at this moment, even the fact of being non-binary is understood. It's been a long journey with my family to get to this point. With friends it was a mixture of circumstances, because distinct groups of people had distinct behaviours towards me. There is a constant pressure and along with that comes the continual policing of how I express myself, how I dress, how I present myself - I always question whether I'm being enough of a woman to say that I am a woman.

Some of the harassment is more permanent and of a more aggressive kind, as I'm seen as a woman and trans. This whole situation is quite tiring and difficult, and in my case in particular (because each person's experience is different), it often leads to crises of depression and other more severe states of my mental health. Over time I was able to discover techniques, ranging in difficulty, that allow me to live my days as calmly as possible. Yet it is impossible for me to completely separate my life from the political act that is to reaffirm myself with my identity.

However, despite the immense difficulties, to live according to my identity, according to who I am has significantly improved my quality of life. It improved my perception of myself as a person, I started to smile in a different way and I started to have a more human and more present side. If a few years ago I was living in hiding, nowadays I am proud of myself and of what I am. I live in tune with myself and that is of extreme importance.



For that reason, learning about myself also allowed me to grow. I have volunteered in this field for several years now and currently I am coordinating a group of trans and non-binary people, and I am a member of the management board of an association working for LGBT rights. This has given me strength, courage and the ability to move forward. In the same way that I found support and learnt to accept myself, it is important that other people also feel this togetherness.

Because people are people and should be respected as such.

O meu nome é Daniela Filipe Bento, 31 anos e portuguesa. Sou engenheira de software e estudante de astronomia astrofísica e sou, também, uma mulher, trans, não binária, pansexual e anarquista relacional. O meu processo de descoberta identitária foi longo - na medida que as minhas capacidades pessoais o permitiam. No entanto orgulho-me desse caminho.

Vim de um meio pequeno e religioso e, por isso, a informação sobre identidades não normativas a que tinha acesso era bastante escassa. Na realidade, só soube concretamente o que significava o termo “trans” aos meus 25 anos - alguns anos depois de ter ido para a capital viver. Porém, desde os meus 18, já era conhecida pelo meu nome feminino, em determinados círculos de pessoas - apesar de sentir que não me encaixava num binário de género desde muito cedo (mas sem linguagem para falar disto). As causas e consequências deste tempo de descoberta são várias e circulares, por um lado estava-me a descobrir, por outro lado estava a lutar contra as minhas crises de bipolaridade, foi um desafio enorme.

Uma das minhas grandes dúvidas era como falar deste assunto com as pessoas que me eram chegadas, como lhes poderia explicar? A informação sobre identidade de género é escassa em Portugal e, como consequência, a transfobia é bastante normalizada. No entanto, conseguir descobrir uma palavra que descrevia o que sentia foi de uma importância enorme para a minha própria colocação no mundo - existia uma comunidade e eu podia pertencer a ela - não estava só. Esta é, sem dúvida alguma, a maior gratificação que se pode ter: encontrar pessoas como nós e que vivenciam as

mesmas problemáticas que nós. As mesmas dores, as mesmas dificuldades, as mesmas felicidades.

Foi em 2014 que decidi mudar o meu nome. Em Portugal é ainda necessário um diagnóstico de Perturbação de Identidade de Género para ter acesso à mudança legal de nome e esse processo demorou cerca de dois anos, uma verdadeira dificuldade quando tentava construir os meus alicerces para ter uma vida o mais estável possível. No entanto os desafios não se ficam pelo processo clínico, mas pela dificuldade em vivenciar os meus dias.

A violência que se vive enquanto pessoa trans é imensa e acontece em várias camadas da nossa vida. A transfobia institucional (nos meios de segurança, saúde, educação, etc), as micro agressões normalizadas pela sociedade e a violência explícita contra pessoas de identidades não normativas. No meu caso pessoal conjugo o facto de ser mulher, ser trans, ser não binária, ser pansexual e ser anarquista relacional - não consigo deixar de somar várias discriminações múltiplas no meu dia a dia. Acredito, no entanto, que este é um problema estrutural e cultural.

Enfrentei alguns desafios familiares para ver a minha identidade reconhecida, para me sentir respeitada e, felizmente, neste momento, até o facto de ser não binária é entendido. Porém foi um trabalho longo junto da minha família para chegar a este ponto. Com os amigos foi um misto de acontecimentos porque grupos de pessoas distintos tiveram comportamentos distintos comigo. Existe uma grande pressão e com isso um constante policiamento sobre a forma como me expresso, como me visto, como me apresento - surge sempre a questão de ser mulher o suficiente para dizer que sou mulher. Também o assédio passou a ser permanente

e de uma forma mais agressiva por ser lida enquanto mulher e enquanto trans. Todo este processo é bastante cansativo e difícil e, no meu caso em particular (porque cada experiência é uma experiência), demonstra-se muitas vezes em crises depressivas e em estados mais graves da minha saúde mental. Ao longo do tempo fui conseguindo descobrir técnicas mais e menos difíceis que me permitam viver os meus dias da forma mais tranquila possível. Ainda assim é-me impossível separar por completo a minha vida, do acto político que é reafirmar-me com a identidade que tenho.

Porém, apesar das imensas dificuldades, viver de acordo com a minha identidade, de acordo com quem eu sou, melhorou significativamente a minha qualidade de vida. Melhorou a minha percepção de mim mesma enquanto pessoa, passei a sorrir de uma forma diferente e passei a ter um lado mais humano e mais presente. Se há uns anos vivia a esconder-me, hoje em dia tenho orgulho da minha pessoa e daquilo que sou. Vivo em sintonia comigo e isso é de uma importância extrema.

Por isso aprender sobre mim também me permitiu crescer. Faço voluntariado há vários anos nesta área estando neste momento a coordenar um grupo de pessoas trans e não binárias e faço parte da direcção de uma associação que trabalha em prol dos direitos LGBT. Isto dá-me força, coragem e capacidade de seguir em frente. Do mesmo modo que encontrei para mim referências para quem eu era, é importante que outras pessoas também possam sentir essa proximidade.

Porque todas as pessoas são pessoas e devem ser respeitadas enquanto tal.

# SABRINA, NETHERLANDS

**How they present themselves in their gender is an important concern for many trans people, finding styles and behaviours that are appropriate to their real identity. Especially for older people, there is strong pressure to ‘pass’, to present themselves so closely to gendered stereotypes that no-one can question them. In some places much of this pressure comes from the medical establishment. Sabrina writes here about her long process of consciously learning, finding an authentic life for herself in the Netherlands.**

My first experience of female feelings was in the Netherlands in 1944 at the age of 4. I found two small dresses of a girl that had stayed with us some time ago. Of course, children love dressing up, but this time this did not feel at all like Halloween but much more intense, and many more corresponding experiences followed in the rest of my youth. I continued to dress up as a girl when I could and was jealous on my girls next-doors. When I was 7, I forced my mother to let her charwoman sew something like a dress for me. At my primary boys’ school, I basically had very little social contact with other boys. I was not at all attracted to their boy’s behaviour and my class companions were basically not at all interested in me and basically ignored me during the pauses.

But when I was 11, that boys school celebrated a jubilee with a play, in which I was requested to perform the role of the princess! Three marvellous afternoons! All my classmates all of a sudden wanted to sit beside me in a picture! Much later I realised that another classmate was teased frequently in that time because of being a bit “feminine”, but I never have been teased, nevertheless I was selected for that female princess role! One way or another apparently, I must have had some unapproachable barrier. My pure personal feelings were absolutely private to me and were protected by a thick wall against any hostile environmental society. But I never experienced any problems with my self-acceptance!

After that stage performance, I went to many of those after World War II Hollywood show films with many beautiful female stars in such fantastic evening dresses. I never had dreamed to be myself some invincible Tarzan, but I had many many dreams, in which “I” was myself such a beautiful woman in such a very lovely evening dress! But in the meantime, that puberty, with that awful change of voice and the coming up of a horrible beard and other horrible body hair, came closer and closer. My mother, but primarily my granddad, wanted me to stop that female type dressing up, but I found the following trick to blackmail my own mother! She had two charwomen, one for every day in our own living environment and one for twice a week cleaning the optician store of my father. In those days, my mother ordered these women always to wear, during their duties, no trousers and appropriate aprons. But these women also would sometimes become sick or even disappear completely all of a sudden. I offered in such cases to my mother to do that work in the meantime. My mother and my sister hated that type of work

and basically, she did not have an alternative right away to reject my offer. So, then I went to the cupboard, pulled on an apron dress over my short trousers and started, as a real daughter of the family to clean e.g. the shop of my father. That happened more times and my mother definitely must have known why. Later on, I even had my own apron hanging in our kitchen!

But in those days I could finally only surrender myself to the fact, that I would have to live as a boy and later to continue as a man. So, I graduated with an MSC and succeeded for 32 years to perform in a marvellous job with very many international contacts and projects. In 1970, I even married a woman, after telling her about my female feelings. But she was convinced that these feelings would disappear in a marriage. That appeared to be nonsense. In 1982 both of my parents had died already and my wife and I lived in a kind of brother sister relation in our house with separated sleeping rooms but we still felt very respectful of each other. She wanted to start an extramarital relationship, and we agreed that I would start further investigations in how my suppressed female feelings really were and what I could do and finally wanted to do with those feelings. I felt already in that time, that the only person that could investigate my pure own and deepest gender identity feelings was only: "ME", and absolutely not some psychologist or psychiatrist out of his or her ivory tower approximation. I wanted to feel myself, how it is to be seen, treated and accepted as a real female in our society, and that cannot be experienced in those private transgender community meetings. But unfortunately, most men who dress up as a female will experience only how it is to be seen and treated as a "man in a female dress".

Fortunately, my so called “wrong body” is only 1.73 meters (5.7 feet) tall and fits perfectly in dress size “small” and shows, besides baldness and much too much body hair, no significant male characteristics. Recently I had also heard a male imitator producing exactly the sound of various well-known vocalists. Instead of going to a speech therapist I used a tape recorder to find out what kind of voices I could produce. But also, I had to find out the differences in intonation and word choice between males and females. Finally, I used many telephone answering services to find out, if they terminated a chat with “Bye Sir”, or “Bye Madam”. When the last option became dominant I had passed my first examination. Next point is that males and females walk and move in different ways. Normally that is not very notable, but when a female walks as a man or just contrary, many people feel that something is “strange”. From my princess time I remember that I had no problems with moving in a gracious feminine way. So, the only real challenge was not to exaggerate. Last but not least I of course did not have a real feminine education and puberty. A well-known point is that a woman will not sit in her dress or skirt with her legs wide opened. But there are very many small details, that a girl picks up in her education or puberty, that a man does not realise. So, a final touch is always better to be given by some coach that is often in your vicinity. Visiting e.g. shopping malls as a female indicated to me that only a few people seemed to detect that there was something strange with me. I felt again as I had succeeded in an examination.

Next, I accepted a small side job on Friday evenings in another city (Amsterdam), where the business owner knew why I was so eager to assist her without any pay as a



female waiter type assistant in her promotion evenings to attract new clients. My so called “wrong body” let me at least already discover in that starting up project, how it feels not to be seen as a man in a dress, but as a real biological woman! Unbelievably nice! Those were certainly my first real fantastic gender conforming feelings! After one year I started also with another transgender person to experience, after 11:00pm closing time, a kind of second puberty by entering the nightlife in Amsterdam. Doing so I also started to make (CIS) friends, who from their side started to invite me also to their homes and somewhat later even for parties. At such a party, I gave some woman a “cheek-kiss”, after which she produced a loud yell, because she felt something on my cheek that she had never expected! That was the starting shot for my 500 hours electrical face and upper body hair removal program. During summertime, I waxed my legs.

On a Saturday midnight in December 1986, in an Amsterdam cafe where mainly women went, a very nice woman touched me on my shoulder and asked me if she could sit a short time beside me. To make a long story short, that woman still sits beside me, being the very nice partner that I still live together with. Of course, I told my spouse about my new girlfriend. Basically, that would open the way, that we both could develop our new relations fully and still remain friends. Her only worry was at that time, that her place would be taken over now by a woman with motives that were not respectful. I slowly increased the number of nights per week that I stayed in Amsterdam from 1 to 3, but with my wig firmly glued to my forehead. Early 1988 my girlfriend insisted on seeing me one time as a male, to

avoid that she would see me in that way for the first time after e.g. some car incident during my work. So, I invited her one time as a gentleman for dinner. But halfway that dinner all of a sudden Sabrina took over my body. My voice and movements feminized and I could not correct that at all! I gave my wallet to her to pay for the dinner and brought her home and went home after that to my old home. After that happening I arranged for her to visit my old home with my wife there. On that occasion, the ice barrier broke down and both women now can easily go together through one door.

I gave myself in 1990 the green light to live the rest of my life as the person I really am and my girlfriend introduced me in 1990 as her new female partner to her entire social environment. Except for one of her relations, everybody accepted me as her new partner! Fortunately, I don't need hormonal treatment to be accepted as a real woman. Of course, a wig, external breast prostheses and a special bathing suit are essential for my gender expression, but I never felt a need for sex reassignment surgery, so I can feel myself the female I am AND have been accepted as such by my new environment. Because of my international oriented job, I had collected so many airmiles that I could offer first my wife a free "first class" flight to Mexico, where we made a big country sightseeing tour as a kind of farewell. After that I offered my new girlfriend also a free "first class" flight to Los Angeles, Hawaii and New York as a kind of honeymoon. Because of the incoming customs inspection I only made the trip to Los Angeles as a male, but after that I was for the first time in my life six weeks permanently a female! I still had to travel on my male passport but, because I assisted as a small co-author

the psychologist of the gender team in Amsterdam with his book about transvestites, I had organised such a pass with a male and a female photograph plus stamps and signatures of the VUmc Gender Team in Amsterdam. In the Grand Canyon, I even spent a night in the women's dormitory near the Colorado River, because all the 2-person cabins were already reserved many months before. The trip back to Amsterdam I travelled as a female. Next morning, I went first to my beauty specialist to remove some remaining hairs. But she saw in front of her a pure female in men's clothes and advised me strongly, before going to my work, to acclimatize e.g. in a shopping mall to feel me more male again!

In 1991, I became honoured with an order of knighthood. For that ceremony, I went as a male together with my new partner to my old home to meet my director, who didn't know anything about my new life in Amsterdam with a new partner! In 1994, I divorced also officially from my wife, but we still have now and then a nice dinner with four, where her present partner and I can exchange experiences about how it is to live together with my ex!

Because of my many international work contacts and projects in my job, it was almost impossible to inform that whole international world on my wanted gender change and many countries are less tolerant than the Netherlands. But on the other hand, the Ministry I worked for at that time wanted already to embed the type of work that I mainly did into wider industry-related contracts and also had to reorganise, reduce personnel and move my alternative work location to a completely different city. So, I was able to leave my job with a very nice arrangement in 1995! Being pragmatic, I decided to continue and finalise my original job with 5 years of

hybrid life! That became 8 years, but in 1998 I could finally change my first name AND the picture on my driver licence and my passport. Our driver licence has no M/F indication at all, so I could identify AND register myself almost everywhere as Mrs. ... and so I did. In 1998, I also founded my small one person audio recording company and realised my own professional sound isolated and air conditioned daylight recording studio, where I could produce CDs with small ensembles and choirs. But I also started to make concert recordings on location for a small radio broadcasting company, even of huge symphony orchestras in the most beautiful concert halls in the Netherlands like e.g. the small and big halls of the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

Since 1990 I first enjoyed for 16 years my fantastic new life as a female in my new social environment, without any contact with the Transgender community. But in 2006 all our medical insurance companies had to align their client administration with the official government administration and I received, all of a sudden, a renewed healthcare insurance-policy now on the name of Mr. ...! I protested very strongly but without any success. So next I tried to get support by transgender communities of interest and I approached 15 health insurance companies. One of them could still guarantee me an insurance policy on the name of Mrs. ...! Of course, I accepted that offer. When I had to be treated in 2007 at the VUmc in Amsterdam for a cancer in my throat, my family doctor even did not know at that time that I was not a biological female and wrote a referral on the name of Mrs. ... and of course I signed in with my driver licence so I got also a medical file on the name of Mrs. ... But when it came to a chemotherapy, requiring different

medication for males or females, that point was solved in a very discreet and noiseless way.

I also had now become in contact with the Dutch transgender community. There I experienced myself as an alien, because I had never wanted seriously hormonal treatment and/or sex reassignment surgery! So, I started a big survey into how this transgender diverse world really looks like. On one private Internet site, I even was thrown out, because I did not even have the ambition for Sex Reassignment Surgery! What I really hate in the Dutch transgender care is how they think about and treat transgender people as unemancipated people and that they concentrate only on the full 1975 medical transition! Very fortunately I never needed any Dutch psychological, endocrinology or surgical transgender care. But nevertheless, I did have already since 1990 a fantastic nice life as the person I really feel I am, with a very nice partner and since 1995 in a very nice rural environment 25 minutes bus ride from Amsterdam Central Station and with my own business.

For many centuries our primary definition of a male has been “a human with a penis” and a female is “a human with a vagina”. The first Dutch law from 1985 about a formal MtF or FtM sex change required first to undergo a full medical transition. This is quite similar to the rules in some African countries, where a girl can only become a fully accepted female after a circumcision treatment. Already in 2011, I co-operated in the Human Rights Watch activity that resulted in the report: “Controlling Bodies, Denying Identities; Human Rights Violations against Trans People in the Netherlands”. Several statements by me are included in that report. The Yogyakarta Principle 3 from 2006 is

a fundamental change in this way of thinking. Now that definition is based on what that human “feels to be, male or female or something in between”. The Dutch legislation followed this big change quite far in 2014, so I have now also an “F” indication in my passport.

Unfortunately, our Dutch transgender care did not yet follow this new way of thinking. The late 2014 version of the VUmc Gender Team protocol is still fully based on the one and only full medical MtF or FtM transition treatment. Deviations from this standard protocol should be possible, but still appear to be difficult. On the WPATH symposium in Amsterdam in 2016 I brought a poster presentation. In my mind “Optimal State of the art transgender healthcare” should start with an investigation about the momentary situation, experience and wishes of a new candidate. Next this candidate should be supported in discovering as much as possible by self-experience how their wanted gender identity “really feels” and which following possible steps and/or treatment options are really required for him or her from now on, to integrate incongruent gender feelings optimally into a new future life. Besides very good advice, how to come over as a biological woman or man, many transgender people will need also at least a start with hormonal treatment. In addition, MtF transgender people may need depilation of body hair and FtM transgender people may need bust reduction. But when such a person after these steps finally decides not to continue in this way, their situation should not be compared to e.g. a CIS woman that had to undergo mastectomy, because of suffering breast cancer. Some also require sex reassignment surgery.

Mijn eerste vrouwelijke gevoelens ondervond ik op 4-jarige leeftijd in 1944. Ik vond twee jurkjes van een meisje, dat enige tijd geleden bij ons had gelogeerd. Natuurlijk vinden kinderen verkleden leuk, maar het aantrekken van deze jurkjes was veel intenser dan even leuk verkleden en ik beleefde die gevoelens in de rest van mijn jeugd nog vaker. Als het maar even kon verkleedde ik mij als meisje en was jaloers op mijn buurmeisjes. Toen ik 7 was forceerde ik dat mijn moeder haar werkster een jurkje voor mij liet naaien.

Op mijn lagere school voor jongens had ik heel weinig contact met andere jongens. Ik voelde mij in het geheel niet aangetrokken tot hun jongensachtige gedrag en mijn klasgenootjes waren ook totaal niet in mij geïnteresseerd en negerden mij ook tijdens pauzes. Maar toen ik 11 was, vierde die school een jubileum met een toneelstuk, waarin ik de rol van de prinses mocht spelen! Drie fantastische middagen! Plotseling wilden al mijn klasgenoten naast mij op de foto! Veel later realiseerde ik mij pas, dat een klasgenootje van mij regelmatig werd gepest vanwege “verwijfd” gedrag. Maar ondanks dat ik werd uitverkoren voor die rol als prinses, werd ik nooit gepest. Op de een of andere manier was ik gewoon moeilijk benaderbaar. Mijn eigen gevoelens beschermden ik door een soort dikke muur tegen invloeden van een vijandige buitenwereld. Maar ik heb nooit enig probleem met mijn zelfacceptatie gevoeld.

Na mijn deelname aan dat toneelstuk bezocht ik vaak die naoorlogse Hollywood showfilms met veel mooie filmsterren in van die fantastische avondjurken. Ik droomde nooit, dat ik die onoverwinnelijke Tarzan was, maar in veel dromen was ik zelf zo’n mooie vrouw in zo’n heerlijke

avondjurk. Maar ondertussen kwam mijn pubertijd, met die afschuwelijke stemverandering en opkomende baard en andere lichaamsbehaving alsmaar dichterbij. Mijn moeder, maar eigenlijk mijn grootvader, wilden een eind aan mijn vrouwelijke verkleedpartijtjes. Maar ik bedacht de volgende list om mijn moeder te chanteren! Zij had twee werksters, een voor dagelijks in het huishouden en een voor het tweemaal per week schoonhouden van de optiekzaak van mijn vader. In die tijd eiste mijn moeder, dat zij tijdens dat werk geen broeken maar wel een degelijk schort dienden te dragen. Maar die vrouwen waren natuurlijk ook weleens ziek of kwamen ineens helemaal niet meer opdagen. Ik ben toen mijn moeder gaan aanbieden om in zulke perioden dat werk dan maar even over te nemen. Mijn moeder en mijn zus haatten dat werk en een ander alternatief, om mijn aanbod af te wijzen, was er niet gelijk. Dus ging ik dan naar die werkkast, trok zo'n jurkschort over mijn korte broek aan en ging, als een echte dochter des huizes de winkel van mijn vader schoonmaken. Dat ging meer keren voorkomen en mijn moeder moet absoluut geweten hebben waarom. Nog wat later had ik zelfs mijn eigen schort in onze keuken hangen!

Maar in die tijd kon ik mijzelf alleen maar overgeven aan het feit, dat ik uiteindelijk moest gaan leven als een jongen en vervolgens als man. Ik studeerde af als ingenieur en bouwde gedurende 32 jaar een fantastisch mooie job binnen ons Min. van Defensie op, met vele internationale contacten en projecten. In 1970 trouwde ik zelfs met een vrouw, na haar verteld te hebben over mijn vrouwelijke gevoelens. Maar zij was ervan overtuigd, dat die in een huwelijk zouden



verdwijnen. Dat bleek totaal onjuist. In 1982 waren mijn ouders al overleden en leefden mijn vrouw en ik als een soort broer en zus in ons huis met separate slaapkamers, maar wij hadden nog wel heel veel respect voor elkaar. Toen zij een extra latrelatie wilde opstarten kwamen wij overeen, dat ik nu verder zou gaan onderzoeken hoe mijn lang onderdrukte vrouwelijke gevoelens er eigenlijk precies uitzien en wat ik daarmee verder aankon en wilde. Ik vond toen al, dat echt uitsluitend ikzelf de enige ben die mijn puur eigen diepste gevoelens inzake genderidentiteit kan onderzoeken en niet een of andere psycholoog of psychiater vanuit een ivoren toren benadering. Ik wilde zelf ervaren hoe het voelt om als een “echte vrouw” in onze maatschappij gezien, behandeld en geaccepteerd te worden. En dat kun je natuurlijk niet ervaren in die besloten T&T bijeenkomsten. Maar helaas kunnen de meeste mannen die een jurk aantrekken alleen maar ervaren hoe de maatschappij hen als “man in jurk” ziet en behandelt.

Gelukkig mat mijn “verkeerde” lichaam maar 1,73 meter hoog, paste perfect in jurkmaatje “small” en vertoonde, naast kaalheid en veel te veel lichaamsbehairing, geen storende mannelijke kenmerken. Kort daarvoor hoorde ik ook een mannelijke imitator het stemgeluid van diverse toen beroemde zangeressen precies imiteren. In plaats van naar een logopedist te stappen, ben ik voor een badcorder gaan uitproberen wat ik met mijn stem kon doen. Maar ik moest ook verschillen in intonatie en woordkeuze tussen mannen en vrouwen gaan achterhalen. Tot slot gebruikte ik veel telefonische informatienummers om te ervaren, of zij een gesprek nu gingen afsluiten met “dag meneer” of “dag

mevrouw”. Toen dat hoofdzakelijk de laatste optie werd, was ik geslaagd voor mijn eerste examen. Maar het volgende punt is natuurlijk, dat mannen en vrouwen anders lopen en bewegen. Normaal valt dit nauwelijks op, maar als een vrouw loopt als een man of net andersom, dan ervaren veel mensen dat als vreemd. Van mijn prinsesstijd herinner ik mij, dat ik geen problemen had om mij op een gracieuze vrouwelijke manier te bewegen. Dus was mijn uitdaging om niet te overdrijven. Een ander bekend punt is, dat vrouwen in een rok of jurk nooit wijdbeens zullen gaan zitten. Maar er zijn heel veel van dat soort kleinere punten, die een meisje tijdens haar opvoeding of puberteit oppikt, maar die een man ontgaan. Dus het fijnere bijschaafwerk kan altijd beter verzorgd worden door een soort coach, die regelmatig bij je in de buurt is. Door als vrouw winkelcentra te gaan bezoeken ervaarde ik, dat weinig mensen leken op te merken, dat er met mij iets vreemds zou zijn. Als volgende stap vond en accepteerde ik een klein bijbaantje voor de vrijdagavonden in een andere stad (Amsterdam), waar de eigenares op de hoogte was, waarom ik zo graag als vrijwilliger horeca activiteiten voor haar wilde verrichten tijdens haar open avonden om nieuwe klanten te werven. Mijn zogeheten “verkeerde lichaam” liet mij in dat startproject reeds ervaren hoe het voelt om, in plaats van als een man in jurk, gezien te worden als een biologische vrouw. Ongelofelijk fijn! Dat waren absoluut mijn eerste echt fantastische ervaringen in mijn echte genderidentiteit. Een jaar later begon ik tevens met een andere transgender, om na sluitingstijd 23:00 een soort tweede pubertijd in het Amsterdamse nachtleven te gaan ervaren. Op die manier ging ik ook (CIS) kennissen

krijgen, die mij ook thuis gingen uitnodigen en wat later zelfs voor feestjes gingen vragen. Op zo'n feestje gaf ik een vrouw een wangzoentje, waarop zij een keiharde gil uitte, omdat zij op mijn wang iets voelde wat zij absoluut niet had verwacht! Dat werd het startschot voor mijn 500 uren durende epilatie programma voor de verwijdering van al mijn baard en lichaamsbeharing. Tijdens de zomers liet ik mijn benen nog wel harsen.

In een hoofdzakelijk vrouwen cafeetje in Amsterdam tikte op een zaterdag rond middernacht in 1986 een leuke vrouw mij op mijn schouder en vroeg, of zij even naast mij mocht komen zitten. Om een lang verhaal kort te maken, die vrouw zit nog steeds naast mij als de hele fijne partner waar ik nog steeds mee samenleef. Natuurlijk vertelde ik mijn echtgenote over mijn nieuwe vriendin. In principe kon dat voor ons beiden de weg openen om onze beide relaties volledig verder te ontwikkelen en toch goede vrienden te blijven. Haar enige zorg was, dat haar plaats nu zou worden overgenomen door een vrouw met dubieuze intenties. Ik ging langzaam het aantal nachten, dat ik per week in Amsterdam overnachtte van 1 naar 3 opvoeren, maar hield daarbij mijn pruik stevig vastgelijmd op mijn voorhoofd. Begin 1988 wilde zij mij toch een keer als man zien, om te voorkomen dat zij mij zo voor de eerste keer zou zien na bijv. een auto-ongeluk tijdens mijn werk. Dus heb ik haar een keer als echte gentleman uitgenodigd voor een dineetje. Maar halverwege dat diner nam Sabrina plotseling mijn lichaam over. Mijn stem en bewegingen werden vrouwelijker en ik kon dat totaal niet corrigeren! Ik heb toen mijn portemonnee aan haar gegeven om af te rekenen en heb haar naar huis

gebracht en vervolgens naar mijn oude thuis doorgereden. Na die gebeurtenis kon ik haar met mijn echtgenote ook een keer in mijn oude thuis uitnodigen. Bij die gelegenheid werd die ijzige barrière afgebroken en konden beide vrouwen vervolgens samen makkelijk door een deur.

Ik heb mijzelf in 1990 het groene licht gegeven, om de rest van mijn leven door te gaan brengen als de persoon die ik echt ben en zij introduceerde mij als haar nieuwe vrouwelijke partner naar haar volledige sociale omgeving. Behalve een van haar relaties accepteerde iedereen mij als haar nieuwe partner! Gelukkig heb ik geen hormonen nodig, om als echte vrouw geaccepteerd te worden. Natuurlijk zijn een pruik, externe borstprothesen en een beetje speciaal badpakje eerste levensbehoeften voor mijn genderexpressie, maar ik heb nooit een behoefte aan chirurgie gevoeld om mijzelf de vrouw te kunnen voelen die ik ben en als zodanig te worden geaccepteerd door mijn nieuwe omgeving. Door mijn internationaal georiënteerde baan had ik zoveel airmiles verzameld, dat ik eerst mijn echtgenote een gratis eerste klas retour naar haar keuze Mexico kon aanbieden, waar we als een soort afscheid een grote toeristische rondreis hebben gemaakt. Daarna kon ik mijn nieuwe vriendin als een soort “huwelijksreis” ook zo’n gratis eerste klas retourvlucht naar Los Angeles, Hawaï en New York aanbieden. Vanwege de beveiliging bij het binnenkomen van de V.S. vloog ik alleen tot Los Angeles als man, maar daarna was ik voor het eerst in mijn leven zes weken permanent een vrouw! Ik moest toen nog op mijn mannenpaspoort reizen, maar omdat ik de psycholoog van het gender team in Amsterdam toen assisteerde bij het schrijven van zijn boek over travestie,

had ik zo'n verlooppas met een mannelijke en vrouwelijke foto plus wat stempels en handtekeningen van het VUmc gebiedst. In de Grand Canyon sliep ik zelfs een nacht in de vrouwenlaapzaal naast de Colorado rivier, omdat alle 2-peraoons cabines al vele maanden van tevoren waren gereserveerd. Ook de terugreis naar Amsterdam reisde ik als vrouw. Een dag later ging ik naar mijn schoonheidsspecialiste om nog wat resthaartjes weg te laten epilieren. Toen zag zij echt een vrouw in mannenkleding voor zich en adviseerde mij dringend, alvorens naar mijn werk te gaan, eerst in bijv. een winkelcentrum te gaan acclimatiseren, om mij weer wat meer mannelijk te gaan voelen!

In 1991 ontving ik een Koninklijke onderscheiding. Om die opgespeld te krijgen, ging ik samen met mijn nieuwe partner als man naar mijn oude woning om mijn directeur te ontmoeten, die niets wist over mijn nieuwe leven met een nieuwe partner in Amsterdam! In 1994 ben ik ook officieel gescheiden van mijn echtgenote, maar we eten nog steeds af en toe met zijn vieren bij elkaar, waar haar huidige partner en ik ervaringen kunnen uitwisselen over hoe het is om met mijn ex samen te leven!

Door mijn vele internationale contacten en projecten in mijn werk, was het praktisch onmogelijk om zo'n hele internationale wereld voor te bereiden op mijn genderwisseling en vele landen staan hier ook nog minder tolerant tegenover dan Nederland. Maar daarnaast wilde het Ministerie waar ik voor werkte mijn type werkzaamheden eigenlijk liever in groter verband uit gaan besteden naar de Industrie. Tevens moest men reorganiseren, personeel afstoten en mijn mogelijke alternatieve werklocatie naar

een heel andere stad verhuizen. Daardoor zou het mogelijk worden om mijn baan in 1995 met een zeer aantrekkelijke regeling te verlaten. Pragmatisch als ik ben, heb ik besloten om mijn baan dan maar met 5 jaar hybride leven af te gaan sluiten! Dat werden 8 jaren, maar in 1998 kon ik dan eindelijk mijn voornaam en pasfoto op mijn rijbewijs en paspoort veranderen. Ons rijbewijs heeft geen M/V- vermelding, dus kon ik mij haast overal legitimeren én inschrijven als Mevrouw ... en dat deed ik dus. In 1998 richtte ik ook mijn ZZP-geluidsopname bedrijf op en realiseerde ik mijn eigen professionele geluidgeïsoleerde en airconditioned daglicht opnamestudio, waar ik met kleine ensembles en koren CDs ging produceren. Maar daarnaast begon ik ook concert opnamen op locatie voor een kleine radio-organisatie te maken. Zelfs van grote symfonieorkesten in de mooiste concertzalen in Nederland zoals bijvoorbeeld de kleine en grote zalen van het Concertgebouw en het Muziekgebouw in Amsterdam.

Sinds 1990 heb ik eerst 16 jaren genoten van mijn fantastische nieuwe leven als vrouw in mijn nieuwe sociale omgeving, zonder enig contact met de transgender gemeenschap. Maar in 2006 moesten ineens alle zorgverzekeraars hun klantenbestanden gaan synchroniseren met de Gemeentelijke Basis Administratie en ontving ik plotsklaps ineens weer een polis op naam van Meneer ... ! Ik heb daar krachtig tegen geprotesteerd, maar zonder resultaat. Vervolgens heb ik steun gezocht bij transgender organisaties en heb ik 15 zorgverzekeraars benaderd. Een van hen wilde mij nog steeds schriftelijk een polis op naam van Mevrouw ... garanderen. Natuurlijk heb ik dat aanbod geaccepteerd.

Toen ik in 2007 nota bene in het VUmc voor een keelkanker moest worden behandeld, wist mijn huisdokter op dat moment niet, dat ik geen biologische vrouw was en schreef een verwijzing op naam van Mevrouw ... en natuurlijk schreef ik mij bij hun balie met mijn rijbewijs in en dus kreeg ik ook een medisch dossier op naam van Mevrouw ... . Maar toen het op een chemotherapie aankwam, die een verschillende dosering voor mannen en vrouwen kent, werd dat probleempje op een uiterst discrete en geruisloze manier perfect opgelost.

Ondertussen was ik dus ook in contact gekomen met de Nederlandse transgender gemeenschap. Daar ervaaarde ik mijzelf als een buitenaards wezen, omdat ik zelf nooit hormonen of operaties heb gewild. Dus ging ik serieus onderzoeken, hoe onze diverse transgender wereld nu eigenlijk in elkaar zit. Op een besloten internet forum werd ik zelfs geroeyeerd, omdat ik zelfs niet de wens had om een operatie te ondergaan! Wat ik echt verafschuw in onze Nederlandse transgenderzorg is hoe zij over transgenders denken en hen behandelen als wilsonbekwame mensen en dat zij zich uitsluitend focuseren op die enige allesomvattende transitie uit de jaren 1975. Ik ben dolblij, dat ik nooit enige Nederlands psychologische, endocrinologische of operatieve transgenderhulp nodig heb gehad. Maar desalniettemin heb ik sinds 1990 een fantastisch mooi leven kunnen leiden als de persoon die ik voor mijn gevoel echt ben, met een geweldig fijne partner en sinds 1995 een fijne landelijke woonplek op 25 minuten busrit van Amsterdam Centraal en met mijn eigen bedrijfje.

Vele eeuwen is onze primaire definitie van een man:

“een mens met een penis” en van een vrouw : “een mens met een vagina” geweest. De eerste Nederlandse wet van 1985 over de geslachtsverandering vereiste primair, dat alle haalbare medische ingrepen voor een volledige medische transitie waren uitgevoerd. Dit lijkt sterk op de situatie in sommige Afrikaanse staten, waar een meisje uitsluitend als volwaardige vrouw kan worden erkent, wanneer zij eerst een besnijdenis heeft ondergaan. In 2011 heb ik al meegewerkt aan een Human Rights Watch initiatief, dat resulteerde in het rapport : “: Controlling Bodies, Denying Identities ; Human Rights Violations against Trans People in the Netherlands”. Diverse uitspraken van mij zijn in dat rapport opgenomen. Het Yogyakarta Principle 3 van 2006 is een fundamentele wijziging in deze manier van denken. De nieuwe definities gaan ervan uit of iemand zich een man, een vrouw of iets daar tussenin “voelt”. De Nederlandse wetgever heeft deze grote verandering in 2014 verregaand overgenomen, dus nu heb ook ik een “V” indicatie in mijn paspoort.

Helaas volgde onze Nederlandse transgenderzorg deze nieuwe manier van denken niet. De eind 2014 versie van het VUmc Gender Team protocol is nog steeds volledig gebaseerd op die allesomvattende medische MtF of FtM transitie behandeling. Afwijkingen van dit protocol zouden mogelijk moeten zijn, maar blijken nog steeds erg moeizaam. Op het WPATH-symposium van 2016 in Amsterdam heb ik een poster presentatie verzorgd. Naar mijn mening zou een “Optimale hedendaagse transgenderzorg” moeten beginnen met bij de nieuwe kandidaat eerst te onderzoeken, welke achtergrond, ervaring en wenspatroon die heeft. Vervolgens zou die kandidaat moeten worden geholpen om



zelf te ervaren hoe de gewenste genderidentiteit “werkelijk aanvoelt” en welke volgende stappen en/of behandelingen voor hem of haar echt noodzakelijk zijn om hun incongruente gendergevoelens optimaal in het vervolg van hun leven te integreren. Naast professioneel advies, hoe men beter als biologische man of vrouw kan overkomen, zullen veel transgenders ook een begin van hormoonbehandeling ambiëren. Daarnaast zullen MtF transgenders mogelijk epilatie van lichaamsbehaarings en FtM transgenders mogelijk borstamputatie nodig hebben. Maar als zo iemand na dit soort stappen toch besluit om niet verder te gaan op deze weg, dan mag hun situatie niet vergeleken worden met die van bijv. een CIS-vrouw die vanwege borstkanker een mastectomie heeft moeten ondergaan. Een aantal zal uiteindelijk ook een geslachtsveranderende operatie wensen.

# JAMES, BRAZIL / UK

**For all trans and non-binary people, just dealing with bureaucracy is a constant challenge, whether it's being accepted on the phone as yourself, or having to choose options on forms which don't fit. In this wry piece, James describes the hoops he and his partner had to go through to get married.**

Realism Warning: This guide is based on the real-life experience of a transgender couple who got in a civil partnership in 2013, when the UK was still campaigning for equal marriage. At the time of writing (2017), said couple is still happily together. However, the reasons their story became so hilarious and confusing are still to be addressed.

Shameless Sales Pitch Warning: Are you in love with someone? Are you being relentlessly pestered by friends and family about “tying the knot” with them? And are you refusing to even consider that possibility because marriage (and civil partnership) is a patriarchal tool of oppression?

Then this guide is for you!

**How to Make the Most Hilariously Confusing Civil Partnership**

(Hint: be trans, be an immigrant, and have documents on at least two different names)

### **Step 1: Choosing the Partner**

Be a transgender man and an immigrant to the UK.

Fall in love with a partner who is also not from the UK, and trans-masculine non-binary.

Check that the countries we are from have complicated and outdated systems for name change.

Feel sorry/angry/sad/(insert your own emotions here) that, due to those complicated and outdated systems, you both still have birth certificates stating you are female.

Get bonus points if at least one of you has been transitioning for a while and already has a beard and deep-ish voice.

Add a cherry on top of the cake if one of you has had an official name change in your country of origin, but without a corresponding change in the gender marker (again due to complicated and outdated regulations for name change), meaning you have a male name on a birth certificate that still considers you female.

(Optional) Weep because it's only Step 1 and you already have no clue of what is going on. Alternatively, take a shot or two until it begins to make sense or you're so wasted it doesn't matter anymore.

### **Step 2: Fitting into the Narrowest Boxes**

Go to the local office responsible for issuing marriage licences.

Be told by the person at the desk that no matter how many UK-issued documents you have stating your actual gender (including visas and bank accounts), the only thing that matters for civil partnership/marriage is what your birth certificate says.

Remember that a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) would be the only document capable of overwriting the birth certificate rule.

Weep because neither you nor your partner have one.

Add extra salt to the tears if this is because one of you is not eligible for it yet.

Eat a whole ice cream tub if the partner eligible for the GRC decided not to get one because it means his partner would be forced to become his “wife”, and the civil partnership would have to be a mixed-sex marriage instead.

### **Step 3: At the Ceremony**

Decline to say any vows because that would require calling your partner by his old name.

Impersonate a lie while signing the piece of paper that says you are female.

Marvel at how this masculine couple just got registered in a civil partnership as lesbians.

Laugh along the Assistant Registrar when you point out that this same-sex civil partnership actually has a male and a female name on it (due to one partially-accomplished name change), making it the first mixed-sex civil partnership in the country.

Exchange knowing smiles with your partner because you have successfully screwed the system that was built to screw with you.

### **Step 4: The Aftermath**

Party. Party hard (alcohol and other drugs are strictly optional). Be proud of your achievement and brag about it to your friends and family.

Use this story in LGBT intersectional trainings to explain why people who are both trans and migrants have different issues than people who are just trans or just migrant (and take some pleasure in watching people's brains explode as they try to follow the events).

Wonder how to turn this whole thing into a stand-up comedy routine.

Congratulations, you are on your way to creating the most hilariously confusing civil partnership of your life!

Alerta do contexto: Este guia foi baseado na história real de um casal de homens trans que registraram sua união civil no Reino Unido em 2013. Naqueles tempos, a campanha para casamentos igualitários ainda não tinha dado frutos. Quando este guia foi escrito (2017), o casal trans em questão ainda vivia bem feliz junto. No entanto, as razões pelas quais sua história se tornou tão absurda e confusa não mudaram em nada.

Alerta de publicidade: Você já se apaixonou por alguém? E por causa disso sua família e amigos não largam do seus pés para que se casem de uma vez? E vocês já cansaram de dizer pra todo mundo que não, não vai rolar porque casamento (e união civil) é uma ferramenta opressora do patriarcado?

Então este guia é pra você!

**Como fazer a união civil mais absurda e confusa jamais vista**

(Dica: seja trans, imigrante e tenha documentos em pelo menos dois nomes diferentes)

### **Primeiro passo: Escolhendo o companheiro**

Seja um homem trans imigrante no Reino Unido.

Apaixone-se por um homem trans não-binário que também não é do Reino Unido.

Certifique-se que seus países de origem têm procedimentos complicados e bem antiquados para mudança de nome.

Fique triste/brabo/desapontado (insira outros sentimentos aqui) que, por causa desses procedimentos complicados e antiquados, vocês dois ainda tem certidões de nascimento registrando-os como do sexo feminino.

Ganhe um ponto extra se um de vocês começou o processo de transição faz um tempo e por isso já tem barba rala e voz meio grossa.

Ganhe mais mil pontos se um de vocês já mudou de nome em seu país de origem, mas, por causa daqueles procedimentos complicados e antiquados, não conseguiu mudar junto o gênero nos documentos (ou seja, sua certidão de nascimento tem um nome claramente masculino, mas ainda te registra como sendo do sexo feminino).

(Opcional) Senta e chora porque ainda estamos no primeiro passo e você já não sabe mais o que está acontecendo. Ou saia para beber até que tudo comece a fazer sentido ou você fique tão bebum que não se importe que nada mais faça sentido.

### **Segundo passo: conformidade não encontrada, tente novamente**

Vá até o escritório burocrático responsável por organizar cerimônias civis.

Escute a atendente insistir que não importa quantos milhões de documentos do Reino Unido (tipo vistos e contas de banco) vocês têm considerando-os do sexo masculino, o único pedaço de papel que importa para casamentos/uniões civis é a certidão de nascimento.

Lembre-se de que o Gender Recognition Certificate (certificado de reconhecimento de gênero, ou GRC) seria o único documento capaz de passar por cima da supremacia da certidão de nascimento.

Senta e chora de novo porque nenhum de vocês têm um GRC.

Coloque ainda mais sal nas lágrimas se isso é porque um de vocês ainda não satisfaz as condições necessárias para poder pedir um GRC.

Coma um pote de sorvete inteiro (sabor opcional) se aquele que poderia pedir o GRC decidiu não fazê-lo porque isso tornaria seu companheiro sua “esposa”, e a união civil teria que se tornar um casamento tradicional.

### **Terceiro passo: a cerimônia**

Recuse-se a fazer votos porque eles te forçariam a usar o nome antigo de seu companheiro.

Assine uma mentira ao escrever seu nome no papel que diz que você é mulher.

Tenha um momento de insanidade coletiva ao ver que um casal masculino acabou de registrar uma união civil como lésbicas.

Solte gargalhadas com a escritã (e demais envolvidos) ao perceber que nessa união civil de duas pessoas do mesmo sexo na verdade consta um nome masculino e um nome feminino por causa daquela mudança de nome incompleta. Ou seja, tecnicamente você acaba de fazer parte da primeira união civil “heteroafetiva” do país.

Troque sorrisos de cumplicidade com seu companheiro porque foram bem-sucedidos em sua missão de sabotar o sistema criado para te sabotar.

### **Quarto passo: da lua de mel ao resto de suas vidas**

Comemore. Comemore como se não houvesse amanhã (bebidas alcólicas e outras drogas não são obrigatórias ou mesmo aconselháveis).



Sinta-se orgulhoso de seu feito e fique se exibindo para amigos e família até que mandem que você se cale porque os deixa loucos.

Use essa história em treinos de interseccionalidade LGBT para explicar por quê pessoas que são ao mesmo tempo trans e imigrantes precisam vencer obstáculos diferentes dos de pessoas que são só trans ou só imigrantes (e tire certo prazer em ver os cérebros das pessoas explodirem enquanto tentam acompanhar o desenrolar dos fatos).

Ache um jeito de transformar tudo isso em um show de comédia estilo stand-up.

Parabéns, você está a caminho de fazer a união civil mais absurda e confusa jamais vista!

# NIKKI, SCOTLAND

**Being accepted and living an authentic life is a source of great joy for trans and non-binary people. In this lovely piece, Nikki writes about all the things in her life that make her happy.**

Happiness. It is one of the key things that we all strive for in life. It applies to everyone, young or old, rich or poor. It doesn't matter where you live in the world, the colour of your skin, your religious beliefs, your sexuality or even your gender. We so often focus things that have gone wrong or things that bring us sorrow and forget to consider all the things that bring joy to our lives. This short story focuses on some of the things that bring a little bit of happiness into my life and that I would like to share with you.

Where to start? Well as the king said "Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end: then stop." So down the rabbit hole we go!

It all starts with a pair of white 1970s style western knee high boots. I was about eight years old and I found these old things in the bottom of the cupboard in my parent's house. I had actually been looking for my dad's diving mask as I was going on my own little underwater adventure. This all changed when I came across this footwear from yesteryear. Why my mother had decided to keep these fashion "faux pas" is beyond me but this was the early eighties and swirly

wallpaper was still on the walls and “Super Trouper” was still played on the wireless. Maybe she had a secret inkling that they would come in handy if Daniel Boone came around for a little sing along on a Sunday afternoon after the wrestling. Why I decided to try on such travesties of fashion beggars belief. Someone should have stopped me; “Step away from the boots now slowly!” they should have exclaimed. Unfortunately that didn’t happen and I put them on. That was the beginning and the end simultaneously. A cosmic explosion occurred with no warning from NASA. There was a disturbance in the force, Obi Wan Kenobi was silent and even Yoda had nowt to say. Bob Dylan as ever saved the day with “times they are a-changin”.

This was the beginning of my clothes obsessions, which I still happily indulge to this day. As I grew into a teenager, I knew I was different. The guys would say things like “check the pins on her!” or “does she have a licence for that wiggle” whilst I was thinking “I love that dress but I’m not so sure about the shoes.” When my mum was going out, she would have that age old dilemma of what to wear. As a teenager, I would often help out by matching up tops and trousers etc. making it easier for her to choose her outfit. In reality, I probably knew my mum’s wardrobe better than she did. It had become the source of my secret experiments, which brought both thrills and guilt in equal measure. Still to this day I get the excitement on trying on that new dress. After a long hard day, getting home late, my spirits can be lifted by finding a package at the door. Fortunately for me the guilt has long since vanished. I am not ashamed of who I am any more or of the way I like to dress. Everything I wear has been either given to me as a present or I have brought with my own

money. I don't have to borrow anything from anyone now. I do still however cringe at my infringements on my mum's privacy in those early days as I tried to understand who I was. It is funny though, as recently my mum was around at my house, complaining that she had run out of perfume, I didn't get the hint. I was in the lounge and suddenly realised that there was a familiar scent in the air. Yes my mum was borrowing my perfume and examining my jewellery at the same time. There was no apology either! She just said "how much did this cost?" as she examined the perfume bottle and "you have some expensive jewellery!" We then had a very strange mother/daughter style argument where I reminded her that she shouldn't be looking through my possessions and borrowing anything without my permission. I suppose you could say that this is her getting her own back on me for all those times I borrowed her clothes when I was young without her permission. What goes around comes around!

Being out and about can be a lovely thing too. Women coming up to me in clubs and saying things like "Wow! That dress is gorgeous!" or "You look amazing!" I always feel insecure about my appearance when I'm out and about so it does give me a boost that someone thinks I look good. Compliments can certainly lift the spirits and are worth noting and giving to others too, spreading just a little bit of happiness around. When I am out for the evening, I can feel like a bit of a celebrity at times. There are lots of people who just want to talk to me. I often forget how rare trans people are within the general population. I often get the impression that, for many people, I am the first trans person they have ever spoken to. Being a novelty though, quickly gets tedious and some of the best days are when I get completely ignored.

Just being able to go about your business unmolested is a great thing that many people take for granted.

Friendships have an important part to play in my happiness and my general wellbeing. I have very few relatives that I see on a regular basis; my mum is the only relative who knows that I am trans. This makes it all the more important to have friends who understand me and that I can share my thoughts, ideas and feelings with as well as just going out and having a good time. I am very fortunate that I live in a city that has a lively and very active LGBT scene. There are lots of activities being organised in which, I can play a part. These projects can sometimes expose me to new forms of art and culture and provide the opportunity to try doing something that I may not otherwise do, such as writing short stories like this. It also provides opportunities to expand my network of friends, meeting new people and gaining confidence.

I like to get out in other scenes too. I have friends who are involved in the alternative music scene so I often go out with them to different venues. The people on this scene tend to be from all different walks of life but are there to express themselves in their own way and are generally tolerant of others. Being different generally isn't an issue, which is why I like it. Music has been a constant companion of mine throughout my life and my tastes have become quite eclectic. I have friends who are involved in open mic gigs in the city and I sometimes meet up and listen to them. At the other end of the spectrum, I have friends who are interested in the more orchestral music and I have been known to pay the city halls the occasional visit to listen to a recital. I will sometimes go to gigs in the city by myself and just merge into the crowd if I want to listen to a particular artist. I prefer the small and

intimate venues rather than the big stadiums as you can get up close to the artist and see them and hear them properly.

I have also developed a passion for food, as my ever expanding waistline shall testify. I enjoy cooking and have friends over to my house for relaxed meals. The city in which I live provides a wealth of places to eat with cuisine from all over the world and I regularly meet up with friends to enjoy good food and good company.

Technology also has a big part to play in my life. The Web keeps the flow of communication open with friends not just locally but also anywhere in the world. It also keeps me informed of events and allows me to organise gatherings with friends. When I first started going out, I had very few friends with whom I could share my thoughts and feelings. Through the web, I was able to chat to other people in a similar position. This sharing and support was so crucial in my development as a person. I think technology is something that could benefit all trans people worldwide, particularly those in communities where they are the only trans person. The web can be utilised to provide safe spaces where people come together to share with others at a time and in a place that suits them. Whilst there are numerous problems with this kind of technology it provides a way for people to reach out to each other, which is a good thing.

There are times when city life can get a little claustrophobic and it is good to get away. I am very fortunate in that a half hours drive will take me out into the countryside and I can be on the coast within an hour. I sometimes feel the need to leave my gender behind and just get out. Walking through the violet haze in a bluebell woodland is very good for lifting my mood. One of my friends says that “walking is good for

the soul” and this is something that I can relate to. It is a gentle form of exercise and can relieve stress and gives space for me to organise my thoughts. There can also be a certain element of mindfulness too, particularly in spring when there are so many beautiful flowers and blossoms. Just standing in the heavy scent, listening to the birds chatter overhead and watching the insects go about their business, connects me to the world. I also enjoy cycling and exploring the numerous cycle ways we now have around the city. Exercise is good for the body and the mind and particularly to keep a check on that expanding waistline. I find that cycling has an element of freedom to it that I find attractive and an ability to travel and see places from a new perspective.

When you read all of the above you may be under the impression that I am some kind of social butterfly, always on the move and fluttering from one activity to another but this is not the case. I get out as much as I can at the weekend but during the week after a hard day’s work, I am most likely to be found curled up on the couch with the radio on reading a book. I don’t have any particular style that I favour although I do enjoy books that are comical, anything that makes me laugh. I have been told that my sense of humour is quite dry and often quite dark and so the books I most enjoy tend to have an element of dark or satirical humour in them. I also quite enjoy writing and have written a few short stories that I have shared with friends online. I heard on the radio an author describe how your imagination can turn on you if you don’t keep it occupied so spending any spare time I have, giving space for my imagination to wander into is good and it keeps away from the worrying part of my brain as I don’t want those two comparing notes.

There is no doubt that I am very blessed. I get unconditional love and support from my mum and I have a strong network of friends who are there to provide additional support and are there just to have fun. I live in a progressive country with a strong LGBT movement that has an influence on the political decisions in respect to trans people. There is still a long way to go to get trans people completely integrated into what is so often a gender binary world but at least my country is going in the right direction. Being trans is just one small part of who I am and I hope my little story reflects that. I have many interests that I am sure many cis gendered people can relate to. Whilst I may be different in some respects, I probably have a lot more in common with people than first impressions may reveal. Acceptance and tolerance of people who are different reduces the potential for conflict and increases everyone's potential for happiness. Whilst this seems to be a message that is not in vogue at the moment, there is still hope. There is a growing network of people using technology to come together, reaching out across continents, sharing their stories with us all. The book you are reading is a testament to this network as is the Adam World Choir Project, which is reaching out across the world to create a virtual choir, bringing together all our voices and telling our story. These are small stones in big pools but the ripples they create will travel long into the future changing things for the better.

I hope that you have enjoyed reading my little story about the things that bring a little bit of happiness to me and that it has maybe helped you to think about all the things that make you happy in life.



# STEVIE, SCOTLAND

**Some trans people are fortunate enough to have support and love from their families and their children, and to be accepted in their work. Stevie writes here about how she has gone from struggling with her identity while presenting a male face to the world, to embracing her gender with the help and support of the people in her life.**

I am Stevie, I am transgender. I am 50 years old, I am married with adult children and live in the Scottish Highlands. I was born in Windsor in 1966 of an mixed race background, my birth mother was 15 and I was subsequently adopted at the age of 8 months, very much a sign of the times.

I am experientially male, whilst emotionally and intuitively female. I spent my adolescence being brought up in Kent in a farming and rural background. I knew what I was from around age 4 or 5 but it would be another 33 years to acknowledge who I and what I am. I remember I was playing dress up with my Godmother's daughters and my mother called me from downstairs as I trundled along in high heels, she said get that stuff off it's time to go home now, but it was at that exact moment that I realised how right it felt.

For many years I have struggled and ran away from what and who I am, I have submersed myself in increasingly masculine and hazardous activities. The main theme has been twofold; one was to learn and master new skills in order to keep my mind active and away from exploring who I really am, whilst these same activities because they were both hazardous and masculine gave no reason for people to probe past the facade of the extreme masculinity that I projected.

At the age of 11 I decided that I wanted to go into the military. I had already started a Saturday job working on a farm and a combination of schooling, farm work and training to join the royal marines kept my mind active and away from having to deal with what I felt inside. In the 1960s and 1970s, there was nobody to compare myself with in mainstream society and so by day I worked my body so that I could sleep at night and escape the thoughts in my head.

This compartmentalisation and pattern of behaviour that I had instilled in myself continues to this day. At aged 17, I served in the Royal Marine Commandos for just over 13 years, this gave me an opportunity to develop both academically and professionally (qualified in diving, parachuting and as a sniper) and interspersed with operational deployments kept me very busy, but identity questions still sat there gnawing away in the back of my head. During my time in the Marines I married and had 4 children before the marriage ended in divorce after 10 years. I left the marines to pursue a career in the outdoors and ultimately gained high level instructor qualifications in Kayaking, Climbing, Winter Walking, Diving and RYA powerboating.

It was during my time in the outdoors I met my second

wife Jennifer who I have been with for 20 years. Fairly early in our relationship I told Jennifer about my concerns, but at that time I was still on my own journey of self discovery and acknowledgement of who I was and never really came to terms with being trans until 12 years ago.

This is Jennifer's perception of my transition:

*"The journey has not been easy at times but then nothing in life is easy. I sometimes found it very difficult, and I felt extreme loss, and then there were days where I would grieve for my lost husband and when I look back at our wedding pictures I would feel really sad for myself, but then I think "she" was making a very brave effort of being a man and so my struggle paled into comparison. I came to recognise that she was hurting but worried what turmoil her transition would cause us.*

*I was distraught and I worried about lots of things, what happens after Stevie starts hormones would he/she still be attracted to me or was this the end of our marriage? But after a lot of soul searching I kept coming back to the person I loved and what I loved most about Stevie - the loyalty, the kindness, the love for me, the love and acceptance and guidance Stevie has given to my own children as well as her own. I came to the conclusion life without Stevie is unimaginable and so regardless of Stevie's physical form I choose to stay and now it is my turn to "man-up" and support my partner through this, after all her happiness is more important than my fears. Besides we found living in this in-between-world difficult, living a secret life which threatened to spill over into the real world. So the decision was taken for Stevie to fully transition and let everyone know.*

*We knew there would be difficulties as I know some parents*

*banish their transgender children and some adult children turn their back on their transgender parents and stories of employers not being supportive to a transitioning employee. Would I be perceived as lesbian, how would my children view me were all questions that haunted me. But I have learnt so much over the last few years and have come to understand that sex and gender are two different things and it is the person ultimately that matters and so time to ditch the labels. It is not easy for us who are comfortable with our own gender to grasp what an imprisonment it must be to be born into the wrong body and all the turmoil that goes hand in hand with being transgender.*

*I think it is important to become a visible, positive, proud trans person if only to show people that they are not always the sad, lonely, rejected, suicidal people trapped in the wrong body that the media would have you believe. It is also to show that there is life for someone like me after their spouse transitions and that not all marriages need end because of what society would like us to conform to. Sometimes I feel the media is only interested if couples who bitterly finish their marriage or those who say it all sunshine and roses, but the truth is, in most cases, it is somewhere in between.”*

My time in the outdoors furnished me with a host of positive experiences and social skills plus I got to share valuable time with a whole range of diverse and unique individuals and it was during this time that I met my first trans person and things started to click for me

I joined the Scottish Fire Service at the age 37 and after 14 years of service on the front line pumps, I currently work for them as a local trainer serving stations in Lochaber and Skye. I am the first openly uniformed trans person in SFRS.

Although I transitioned in the workplace late 2016, I had actually been living as female for the best part of 10 years whilst being under the care of a Gender Identity Clinic where I had a confirmed diagnosis of gender dysphoria. I found it increasingly difficult to revert back to “male” for work purposes and after transferring to a new training post, 4 months prior to transitioning, this break from my normal shift routine and old colleagues felt like a fresh start. My children were grown and all had their own lives, I had the support from my wife and we had finished building our house and so everything just fell into place.

One day I decided to tell a colleague who was very supportive, our next move was to contact the occupational health team as well as the diversity team and this set the ball rolling. Subsequently a memorandum of understanding was drawn up between myself and my employer, a timely date was agreed, simultaneously senior management informed my local station colleagues via a statement I had prepared, as I met and informed face to face my old crew, and members of the instructional team i routinely worked alongside. I returned to work a couple of weeks later with my gender neutral uniform and new name badge and continued to carry out my duties without any hitches. My workplace transition was and is gold standard. I have been supported and empowered by my employer to lead my own transition. They have supported my wishes to attend LGBT organised training events, role model course and media training held by Stonewall, Scottish Trans Alliance and Equality Network. They have also supported my collaboration of inter-agency working with Police Scotland, NHS, Waverley Care as well as greater

access to more fire stations throughout the Highlands. In this way creating trans awareness by my visibility in the community at large thereby demonstrating that they are an equal opportunities employer.

Unlike many many others I have had a positive transition. At the core of my transition is empathy for those who are important in my life and any upset my revelations may have caused. The first of my children to be informed was my eldest daughter, for her it has been a roller coaster of emotions and at times it has been difficult for her to appreciate that her father is still her father and only my gender is changing, the same is true for my eldest son and youngest daughter although they have found it more difficult. Now post surgery emotions have settled, understanding has grown and our relationships are stronger than ever. My youngest son and two stepsons have been stalwarts in their support for my transition as have their respective partners, for them it is very much business as usual, especially as there has been no change to my sense of humour. The most difficult part of sharing my true gender identity was with my parents mainly because of the generation gap and their religious beliefs. This was obviously a hurdle we all had to negotiate, for my father this was very straightforward and easier for him than my mother, but they have been 100% supportive and are happy that I am finally at peace and that they love me all the same.

We need to show that trans people are regular people who do regular jobs, they eat, drink, love, have friendships and family and can and do offer so much to society. Notwithstanding all of the above, as humans we all have a responsibility and duty to be compassionate and considerate

with all those we meet and influence, whilst continuing to be supportive we must conduct ourselves with integrity and dignity. After all our time on this planet is very short and we each have a unique opportunity for all of us to make a positive influence on societal changes for the future.

The ongoing support I receive from my wife, children, family, friends and employer has enabled me, finally, to truly embrace my gender identity. I have a constant desire to smile at everybody, to laugh and to dance. I am fortunate to share this life with that special woman and to be at peace with my wonderful surroundings on the west coast of Scotland overlooking a sea loch surrounded by woodlands and living in the house that we built in the shadow of Ben Nevis. An Achievement.

I am Stevie and I am transgender.

# LYNDSAY, ENGLAND

**All of the stories in this collection have been from trans and non-binary people who feel the need to explain themselves to a world that doesn't understand them; to be accepted as people. Lyndsay writes here about a project that she has developed in which trans people sit for conversations with people who are curious, and how it feels to be accepted without question.**

Let's start with work – how do I help pay the bills? I am a Teacher, Educator, Researcher, University Lecturer and an Applied drama practitioner. More on this in a moment.

I'm also a wife, parent, and sister. I have one sibling, several brothers and sisters in law, two children and a dog. I live in a tiny rural village, within striking distance of the parliamentary 'swing' seat of Lincoln, UK.

I transitioned later in life, without changing employment, without moving home and with the staunch, enlightened and principled 'wrap around' support of my professional colleagues. I have been gifted with the unflinching, generous affirmation of my loved ones together with many lifelong and more recent friends, who have walked alongside me on this journey. I am painfully aware of how fortunate I am yet it would be wrong to imply that it has been easy for anyone,



least of all me. It has taken many moons to peel away years of denial and self-loathing, together with the inevitable impact of what is perhaps best not dwelt on but simply understated as ‘unnecessary, unacceptable and unjustified acts of unkindness’. In contrast, it is, however, the acts of kindness, friendly exchanges, and accepting smiles, that stand out, however, fleeting, momentary or passing they may be.

And it’s these casual spontaneous moments, from everyday life, that set me wondering whether it would be possible to create the circumstances through which the serendipity of these encounters could help to de-mystify trans people. There is something about the ‘happy accident’ of a face to face, lived encounter between two people, in a lift, in a queue, in a café that can cut through pre-conceived ideas about others, that is potentially enlightening. So, when I became part of the Adam World Choir and National Theatre of Scotland invited suggestions for the Home-Away international participatory arts festival, I proposed ‘Tea with Trans’ – an invitation to self-identified trans volunteers to devise their own individual ‘conversational menu’ and invite people to have a chat over a cuppa.

So how did it go? Well here are three ‘cameo sketches’ selected from the conversations I had in the mezzanine café-bar of the Tramway, Glasgow, in October 2016:

With a young woman – we talked about ‘blended’ fashion – about mix and match sourcing of clothes, where we shopped and what we liked, including ‘key pieces’ and the fun of scouring charity and vintage stores for bargains. We laughed about finding charity shops in ‘posh areas’ where people’s donations seemed to be expensive clothes in

very good condition and which we were happy to pick up at a fraction of their 'new price' whilst also knowing that our money would go towards that charity's goals. We ran out of time nattering away, smiling and laughing a great deal and exchanging tips on where to look for 'great stuff' and combining a cheaply sourced vintage dress with more expensive accessories such as the silk scarf I was wearing.

With a woman from one of the Hebridean islands - we talked about her sense that she was not conscious that she had encountered a trans person before and that as a teacher, she wanted to ask 'when did you know?' I told her that my earliest memory was around the age of four and that it was running in a school sports day event, wearing a skirt and wondering why it was that people seemed to be laughing at me. I talked about being overwhelmed with emotion, nearly 50 years later, when watching a programme on TV in which Stephen Whittle explained that having been assigned female at birth, he had had the sinking feeling at school sports day at the age of about 4 or 5 that he was running in the 'wrong race'. Our 'Tea with Trans' conversation skipped to my early teenage, pre-internet sense of total isolation, self-loathing and desperation, with my first call to the Samaritans from an old fashioned red phone box just a few yards away from the London to Nottingham mainline. We ended with smiles and mutually appreciative remarks about the value of an authentic exchange such as this conversation.

With a guy from the US - we talked about where the idea for 'Tea with Trans' came from and my Professional Doctorate, the challenge of capturing the energy and spontaneity of an authentic exchange from a completely

chance encounter as part of the course of our everyday lives. I explained that the root of the idea sprang from my everyday lived experience, as described above. He asked whether I got 'fed up' with this and I acknowledged that whilst it could indeed be quite psychologically wearing, I nevertheless saw each of these 'micro-moments' as a positive opportunity, having grown up in an era in which the dangers of such encounters had meant a repressed life lived discreetly and necessarily in the shadows. We talked about how this was a vicious circle of confirming people's distrust and suspicion of the trans population, since they tended to lead 'hidden' lives, the implication of which could be that there must be something 'to hide'. We discussed how the 'Tea with Trans' menu was an attempt to provide sufficient structure to offer a conversation 'starter', a prompt to allow something to evolve and to provide individually 'self-directed' parameters within which to feel comfortable. He felt it worked and that we'd talked about things he'd never thought about before.

So that's a flavour of some of the conversations I had as part of one Tea with Trans event, with people I had never previously met. I found it intense yet never awkward, sharing life experiences, perhaps because of the added 'security' of having identified for myself (as did others) anything which for me was 'off the menu'. I requested specifically not to discuss my voice, as I knew that this might quickly become embarrassingly over-emotional, and embarrassment is one thing 'Tea with Trans' is not about. It might even seem ironic, to have stated this as part of an Adam World Choir event, and perhaps that is a measure of a particular arc in my own journey, which I shall come to.

On a day to day basis and in my everyday working life

like as a University lecturer and Teacher Educator my spoken voice is evidently an integral element of how I present myself. This, together with all sorts of other pre-transition imagined scenarios, could be problematic, I anticipated.

To briefly illustrate this, I reckoned that, of all the classroom observation visits that were and are required as part of my role in supporting trainee teachers become professionally qualified, it might be a setting such as a secondary faith school which could be awkward. I imagined how anxious it might make me feel, walking into a school where my very identity could be seen as problematic. Like many people, especially those of us in the LGBT+ community, I've had what could best be described as a troubled, mixed relationship with organised religion. And I have close friends whose faith, spirituality and values I admire and in many ways, share – I studied in the same setting as the current Archbishop of Canterbury and teach at a University, which is part of a world-wide group of Anglican institutions. A faith based organisation is, in other words, familiar territory for me.

Feel my pulse quicken as I park in the visitor's spot at a faith based secondary school and my anxiety levels rise as I reach reception. I am correctly addressed and signed in with genuine warmth and fluency, without the slightest flicker of unease: I relax. I meet my trainee, I observe their lesson, feedback is given and all is well; there is complete and utter disinterest in my presence from students and staff, other than in respect of my professional role. On my way back to sign out, I make oblique reference to this with my trainee's mentor, who mentions the presence of both a trans pupil and a trans member of staff in the school. I am just another visitor,

as unremarkable as that – just a middle-aged professional carrying out the tasks relevant and necessary to her job.

And so it was with my immediate family, when, finally, prompted and supported by my wife, who has unhesitatingly walked alongside me, I talked about my gender identity with my son and daughter. Embraced by them both and through tears and smiles they tell me they... ‘thought it was something serious, like, you’d got cancer or something... we love you just the same!’ And yes, that does mean that they, just like most close-knit families, have liberty to gently and with love, tease me in the manner of the licensed ‘fools’ of the Shakespearian stage, about all sorts of stuff, not least the ‘ooing and aahing’ exercises I do as I ‘oil’ my vocal range whilst getting ready in the morning!

It has, quite literally, been liberating for me to re-discover my voice in the Adam Choir, that part of myself having been in a kind of suspended animation or hibernation, since childhood, when I sang as a chorister. As a youngster, I step forward, into the wood panelled chapel at Christmas, lit by a single candle. I can sense the quiet expectation and breathing of a tightly packed congregation, watching me from the darkened pews. My parents and grandparents are amongst them. A tuning fork placed just by my ear provides the starting note, I breathe, and begin ‘Once in Royal David’s City...’ I feel listened to; I feel the power and beauty of my voice in that moment. It’s a feeling that, more than 40 years later, I conjure and re-capture, as I listen on an iPad to the Adam World Choir ‘backing track’, and sing: ‘We are Adam, you are our story, we understand, we are real, you are real... All of us are just people – extraordinary people.’

# AFTERWORD

When I transitioned, I gave up my singing voice. This was as much a loss to me as giving up my family; I have been singing in choirs and on stage since I was six years old. As you will have read in the piece I contributed to this book, I found a voice in writing and poetry, but singing has always been a joy to me and I have missed it.

The experience of being part of the Adam World Choir, singing, recording, and contributing my voice and words in a spoken piece for *Adam*, has been a privilege, and I am grateful to National Theatre of Scotland for having made this opportunity available to so many of us. I am also grateful for the events that the Choir has been able to contribute to, and the ongoing work that people from the Choir are doing to promote the voices of trans and non-binary people.

One of those projects has been this book, also supported by Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival, and I'm pleased and proud to have helped to curate and edit it. All of the pieces here are from the experiences of trans and non-binary people, and the theme which I found running through all of them was trying to explain themselves and their feelings to a world which does not understand, and often doesn't accept them. I hope that this goes some way towards helping people understand.

*Elaine Gallagher*

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The **Adam World Choir** is a digital community of transgender and non-binary people all over the world. It was set up as part of the National Theatre of Scotland's 2017 production of *Adam*, a bold exploration of the experience of a young transgender refugee. As part of *Adam* members sang as a mass video choir but have since come together in a many different ways. The Adam World Choir has created an album of original music, a night of international performance, a digital symposium and a night of community conversation, Tea with Trans. Every member of the Adam World Choir has made this project a glorious celebration of trans and non-binary identities around the globe.

[www.adamworldchoir.net](http://www.adamworldchoir.net)

The **Mental Health Foundation** is the UK's charity for everyone's mental health. With prevention at the heart of what we do, we aim to find and address the sources of mental health problems so that people and communities can thrive. The Foundation is a UK charity that relies on public donations and grant funding to deliver its work.

The Foundation is proud of the vital role it plays in hosting, developing and managing the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival ([www.mhfestival.com](http://www.mhfestival.com)) in addition to a year-round arts programme. [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

**Elaine Gallagher** is a writer, screenwriter and poet; her interest is in speculative and weird fiction, and in the way that we each inhabit the same space differently depending on who we are. She writes about queer and transgender identities and is transgender. She is studying creative writing at Glasgow university; her film, *High Heels Aren't Compulsory*, directed by Annabel Cooper and starring Jo Clifford, was shortlisted for the Iris Prize and is now available on Vimeo. [www.elainegallagherwriter.wordpress.com](http://www.elainegallagherwriter.wordpress.com)

**Soofiya** is a visual artist whose art practice and writings aim to articulate a commentary on gender, race, politics and bodies. [www.soofiya.com](http://www.soofiya.com)

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