



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

CONGREGATION OF FREDERICK
Spirituality · Community · Justice

“Identity and Inclusion: Transgender Liberation, part 1 of 2”

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Assigned Male at Birth

Like most of us, my body became objectified and gendered; my anatomy and behaviors were coded and categorized before I could even speak my first words. This would set the stage for the next twenty-one years of my life, where I would be expected to perform masculinity, and eschewed for interests that leaked out of the clearly marked boundaries of boy and manhood. I cannot pretend I wasn't handed a privileged position, as people interpreted my body as male; however, as I would find out, this comes with a bonus: the stigma of perversion for practicing gendered self-care or having preferences that are traditionally gendered feminine.

The first time I invested in my gender was in Grade 5 – the ever-anticipated Career Day. I spent a good sum of my play money to have my nails painted by the girls from the class next door, and boy, was I thrilled with my decision, beaming at my flecked blue tips. So, naturally, I wanted to do what any kid would do — after school, I showed my family, loud and proud. So imagine my surprise when I was told that, well, I was an embarrassment to myself, and oh, “What would people think?”, and that my friends would laugh at me, and for what? A little bit of paint in my nails.

As it turns out, my family were the only ones who actually cared, but their legacy of reinforcing gender was far from over. Forced haircuts, verbalized disgust at dressing in traditionally

“feminine” clothing, and nightly verbal abuse for anything interpreted as sexual deviancy plagued my years as a minor. It’s really hard not to internalize that.

I guess I was lucky to have friends who treated me like I was human in high school. They listened to me when I said I wished I was a woman, and they didn’t hate me for buying women’s clothes with them on our regular mall trips; however, their idea of my self expression had departed from normalcy in their minds, and only reinforced my ideas of who I was — a misfit who could only express myself through deviant behavior. The clothes I bought ended up in a shoebox, hidden beneath my bed.

College, and the Year of Hell

From the first moment of properly exploring gender identity, I knew. I knew from the first image of a happy trans person living in their new body. It all happened when I stumbled onto a popular trans imageboard: trans timelines. I found myself exploring people’s “timelines”: images of them before, during, and after their medical transition.

Stumbling onto these posts rocked my world— no longer were trans people the vain, scary, and perverse people I had grown up being told they were. Suddenly, the thoughts I had stuffed beneath the surface weren’t a perversion, nor were they unnatural; they just might be valid.

For months, I kept my thoughts buried, all while looking up competing opinions. I looked externally to figure out what I was. Some said I was brave and beautiful, but some of the loudest voices said I was a pervert, and a monster. That was hard.

I slowly came out to my closest friends and my partner at the time, who was as supportive as she could possibly be. Still, for the next year of my life, including my semester abroad, I fell apart; suicide was a daily consideration. I frequented support forums, illegal online pharmacies, self-medication guides, and even a hospital, once! Definitely don’t recommend any of that. I spent

my time abroad having the thrills of international life, and the crisis of living inside a body that was not my own.

When I got back to the country, the worst happened: my partner ended our then codependent relationship. Even though it was necessary, it pushed me further into a depressive spiral. Luckily, I found a therapist who loved me as if I was her own child, and gave me sliding scale fees to see her even with a paltry work-study income; a second-wave, lesbian feminist who radiated compassion and realized that I needed the love and attention she could provide. I still see her to this day.

I began medical transition in October 2015. I went low-dose up until this February, because I wasn't sure of what I wanted. Every day was rife with confusion — I felt more comfortable in my body by the day, but I could only be open about myself around my friends since I wasn't out.

That month I started, a popular trans author and storyteller came to my school to perform some excerpts from their books. Ivan Coyote — the name that I'll never forget. I'd love to read a letter that I wrote to Ivan right now — I still haven't sent it, but I'm working on that.

A Letter to Ivan

Hey Ivan,

Look, I don't know if you remember me. I mean, I bet you meet a lot of trans kids out on tour. But I just want to thank you, y'know? You saved me. You gave us all the gift of your time and your stories in that small college basement, and as I compressed my tall frame in the middle of those tiny rows of folding chairs, I lost all composure. I think I kept the noise down, I really hope so; but I will never forget the emptying heave of that cry.

I'm sorry if it was embarrassing, or even worse, distracting — you kept looking me in the eyes, and I felt terrible about being such a wreck, to be sure. But when you butted up against gender in your stories, there was nobody else in that room. You were talking to me. You told me that I

wasn't the only one out there. My stomach kept twisting around, and I couldn't stop it – god help me, I tried. But I needed to be there.

And you knew that.

You could have asked me to leave any time – you could have said anything you needed to – and yet. And yet.

I came to apologize after the show was finished. I didn't really know where to begin. And the moment I faced you, I was met with your hurting, understanding eyes. You didn't tell me that my crying was annoying or distracting, and you didn't pity me. You didn't do what I would have done, either — you didn't ignore it. You told me in your tender voice that my tears were good, and that seeing them almost made you cry on-stage.

Now, I remember you had just gotten your top surgery – your chest was delicate, still tender to the lightest touch. I will always remember that detail, because it made your next move such a surprise.

You asked if you could hug me. You listened to a sputtered life story with open ears, and then you told me it would be an honor to hug me. And as I started crying again, tears spilling onto the rigid, angular button-up that suffocated my form, you wrapped your arms around me. And in a half-whisper, you said it.

“Don't let the world make you hard.”

You autographed that with your contact information in the book you signed for me, and told me to reach out if I ever needed anything. I wanted to wait until the right time to send you this message. I wanted what I said to be important. And I don't know that this is the right moment, but what the hell – I needed to tell you something after all this time.

I don't know what I did to deserve your love. But I've been sure ever since, that even if I wasn't okay, I'd be okay, and that it was okay for me to want this. It was okay for me to be me.

Thank you so much. You helped me make my body my own.

Life Post-crisis; Putting Together the Pieces

About 8 months ago, I met some of my best friends who come at gender from all walks of life. They have been a formative influence in who I am today. They took care of me, reassured me, and helped me back to my feet. Now, I'm out, and I'm resuming life as normal.

Thank you Ivan, thank you Robyn, thank you Deb.

Thank you Jacky,

Thank you Niki, Alexa, Eden, Sandow and Adrian.

Thank you Corinne, Adam, Ashley, and all those that I reached out to online.

Thank you for the love, compassion, and wisdom that spilled over from each and every one of you. I wouldn't be here without it.