

Transgender: a practical guide to coming out - Part I

Written by Brianna Austin

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Coming out and dealing with the reactions of friends and family is just the first of many steps.

Not only do you have to juggle that, but also physical, mental and emotional changes -- and, the practical application of how you can swim against an ever-raging social current pushing back at you. So where does one start?

When someone comes out, they do so for varied reasons; some know from the time they are children that they are in the wrong body, or come to that knowledge later in life. Others are on the fence trying to make heads or tails of feelings they have never quite been able to comprehend, or reconcile within themselves, or simply chasing fantasies that have no practical application in real life.

The good news is that no two people are the same. No two situations are the same; you are a unique individual with as much value as anyone else. But understand that the road of Your life-- the experiences you have, the insight you glean from it, the decisions you make and the quality of it, are yours alone. Friends can walk along with you for a time, but the direction and detours of that ultimate journey is a solitary one -- because you'll never find your nirvana by simply emulating the path of others.

On the one hand this trek can be a scary, while on the other it can be a surprising experience filled with adventures, insights and personal growth. Regardless of whether it ends up where you envisioned it would, the experience unto itself can provide you with invaluable insight to You.

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The decision to come out, and/or ultimately transition is a BIG one, and one that requires some deep and balanced thought. Coming from me, that might seem a bit cautious given my spontaneous and extroverted nature. I've been impulsive, cavalier and -- sometimes -- a bit wild, to be sure. Yet throughout my journey, I've always understood that it is full of constant decisions that only I could make, for which I alone had to bear the responsibility and accept the consequences.

If you approach transition -- and life -- as a victim, you will always be a victim! It's easy to blame mishaps and unfortunate circumstance on others, but we -- all of us -- control our own destiny.

My coming out was born of a deep-seeded frustration caused by the conflict that being a closet cross-dresser created in my life. It didn't matter that on the outside I was a good-looking athletic man, successful in business, or not. Always present was that lingering "what's wrong with me" feeling raging within me causing me to perceive myself as being broken, damaged in some way. Eventually I felt that I needed to resolve that conflict above all else, or I'd never be able to enjoy the fullness and beauty that life has to offer.

Looking back with the clarity that time often provides, I've come to recognize what I did right, what I did wrong, and what I was still left wondering about. I can only hope that by passing that information on that I might help assist you in gleaning more about the road you're on ... by taking a short stroll along mine.

A lot of readers are surprised to learn that the motivation for my coming out wasn't to transition. The truth is that it was a commitment to explore the deep, dark hallways of my soul, in an attempt to discover where this "compulsive" cross dressing behavior in me came from, and to "cure" myself. I was determined to confront it, explore it, understand it to its fullest, and then, to exercise or extricate it from with me so that I could, once and for all, get control of my life back.

What I learned was that there is no prescription, no set way to do anything: nothing is for certain and everything subject to change.

Our gender journey is not unlike that of any traveler who sets out for places unknown, armed

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only with burning desire to explore, a calling for reasons beyond their consciousness. We have no idea where we're going, or what we will find when, and if, we arrive. But without that desire for truth above all else, we're lost, and the current will disorient us to the point that we forget why we even began the trip. The key, in any adventure, is a willingness to search without the fear of what one may find. So at the age of forty-three, I set out with no idea where the trip would take me.

Before the Internet -- and all the information it would subsequently make available -- mine was a dark and narrow road without signposts. Or so I thought, because there are signs everywhere if you have your eyes and mind open! While a tourist "looks," a traveler "sees" and absorbs the world around them. When beginning an exploration of transition, whether it is of gender, career, or life path, one is no longer a casual and occasion tourist; they are travelers en route to distant and undefined lands; gaining insights to new cultures, people and understanding of how it affects them. Thus, transition is not just about you; it's also about how you impact others, and they impact you in relation to the world.

The first step on my path was to become mentally prepared. This required the ability to let go of what "other people might think," and to realize that "the words of others didn't define who I was." Easy to say, not as easy to do; I work on that every day.

Secondly, and equally important, is to recognize that when I went out into the world a Brianna, that for many in the mainstream I was an anomaly that -- to them -- was something out of place, something unusual for which they had no reference except sensationalized headlines, if that. And that's OK. Don't be offended that they don't get you; they're allowed to have their own initial impressions. Tolerance should be part of your travel kit.

While I was secure and steadfast in my right to be who I decided to be, I had to also allow others that same right to feel however they did about it. When I'd encountered people, my goal was to educate when I could, and move on when I couldn't. It was never to gain their acceptance, or change their minds.

What I discovered was that with the absence of intent [to convert them], most people were more relaxed, and subsequently more willing to "listen." Talking with one that doesn't know about, or understand, what being transgender really means, an aggressive, defensive posture by us just makes them dig deeper into their own views.

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Have you ever engaged in debate about religion, trying to change someone's beliefs? You can't change people's beliefs; you can only provide information that with time allows them the opportunity to change their own perspectives based on the information provided. So, in the words of Lao Tzu, Live your religion without the need or intention of trying to convert anyone, or convince them that you're right.

To me, this was a key to my effortless movement through society: I never challenged people's belief, nor sought their acceptance. I simply stated my position, and let them feel however they wanted to about it, with the right to "respectfully" disagree.

I'm not suggesting that you allow people to verbally (or physically) abuse you. If they don't get what you're saying, or don't want to, simply ask why? A question is far more powerful in a discussion than a statement, with the ability to sometimes open up someone's mind. And always [maintain a sense of humor about the situation and yourself, and, be willing to laugh with them, not at them -- while getting them to laugh with -- not at --you](#) .

In Part II I'll delve into my first days in the workplace, among other things.

Until then, remember to be happy, be safe, love yourself -- and always think pretty!