

Parent Story – Dad in Virginia

I'm a lifelong liberal Democrat, and very open minded. A lot of people find this surprising if they get to know me well enough to learn I happen to be a straight white guy who grew up in a small southern town where I turned in tickets for my school lunch while my widowed mother supported 3 children on a church choir director's salary plus Social Security. But my Mom raised me right, I worked hard, built a successful company, recently sold it, and now devote much of my time and resources to making the world a better, more equitable, and inclusive place for everyone. I tell you this because the notion that I could be a "bigot" or "transphobic" is laughable to anyone who knows me well.

Enough about me. I'm here to tell you about my daughter, who turned 18 in October. Every year since she was 4 years old, I've filmed an interview with her on her birthday, asking about her favorite activities, friends, teachers, books, music, and her hopes and dreams for the future. I recently watched them all, and up through 12 years old I see my happy, feisty, feminine daughter accompanied by her beloved American Girl dolls, pretending to nurse her stuffed animals, and always wearing 2 or 3 shades of pink clothing often accessorized with hello kitty sunglasses.

At 13, the changes in my daughter are stark. It was like seeing a completely different person – surly, withdrawn, and covering up hurt and insecurity with anger and indifference.

When she entered her private all girls' middle school and hit puberty she began struggling socially. She plumped up while almost all her classmates unfairly remained thin and athletic. She befriended several older girls who also didn't fit in, and at age 14 she and her 3 closest friends declared that they were first gay, then bisexual, then demi-girls, then pansexual, and ultimately announced that they were transgender boys – but gay transgender boys, because they were still attracted to boys. I'll give you a second to let that one sink in, as most people find it a little bit mind-bending. Young teenage girls who suddenly say they are boys, and gay boys at that, choosing and changing labels about their gender identity and sexuality, quite likely before they have ever been kissed.

During middle school she became anorexic. I hope none of you have ever battled anorexia or seen somebody close to you go through it. It's like watching someone you love being possessed by a demon. We live in a college town and took our daughter to the University Health Clinic, where she was treated for anorexia for 18 months. During one visit she became so upset that she began destroying equipment in the exam room and we were asked to leave. During a subsequent visit, she announced to the doctor that she thought she was "trans." Within 10 minutes of this pronouncement, the doctor asked our daughter if she was interested in going on testosterone. My wife, who was in the room at the time, regrets to this day that she was stunned into silence.

Just to recap, in the same clinic where our daughter had become notorious amongst their small staff for raging outbursts and clear signs of poor mental health, they followed the "gender affirming model," immediately validated our troubled daughter's claim of "trans," and offered her hormone therapy – all within 10 minutes.

I've met many parents who are open-minded, accepting, liberal leaning people like myself who have been pushed to the brink of insanity by all this. The doctor suggesting these treatments to our daughter did not spend any time considering her past mental health, asking about a history of gender dysphoria, or explaining the known risks of testosterone treatments to females, including but not limited to infertility, altered brain development, vaginal atrophy, and urinary incontinence.

The years from 14 to 17 were like watching a slow-motion train wreck, as my daughter's mental health continued to devolve, despite my wife and I following the advice of the Gender Clinic to allow her to legally change her name and enter high school known as a "boy".

We discovered that she was self-harming at age 15, when we went to the beach and saw over 50 razor blade cuts she had been hiding on her upper arms. She once cut so deeply that it required emergency room treatment and 2 days of inpatient psychiatric evaluation. I then bought a medical grade skin adhesive called Dermabond, and glued her back together several times at home rather than going to the hospital.

Thankfully, the love that has kept our family glued together has made the Dermabond obsolete. It took time, but we helped her love herself enough to stop the cutting when she was 16.

Fortunately, a few days before her 18th birthday, my wife and I had a breakthrough conversation with our daughter. We knew she was set to go to Planned Parenthood in Richmond where her trans friends had assured her she could easily get testosterone without any hassle. My wife looked our daughter in the eyes and said "I know you, and I know you want out of this. You don't have to do this now. Just give it some more time." Our daughter protested but then agreed, and we sealed the deal by offering to get her a new puppy as an emotional support companion.

That was 6 months ago. Since being relieved of the pressure to make medical changes to her body, our daughter is clearly much happier. Although she still goes by her chosen boy's name, she dresses not just femininely but provocatively, choosing lowcut tops and lacy bras that show off the breasts that had for years been confined in a binder while awaiting a plastic surgeon's scalpel.

She is currently a Senior in high school and the captain of her rowing team. In her sophomore and junior years she rowed as a "boy," often coming in near last place. This spring she decided to row as a girl.

In recent competitions she has finished ahead of girls with rowing scholarships from Cornell, Duke, and the University of Michigan. She puts a happy face on it, but I can hear the hurt in her voice that she missed the opportunity to earn a scholarship from a competitive college because she rowed as a boy during the recruiting year. She is graduating at the top of her class, scored 780 on the verbal SAT, has a mile-long list of achievements and contributions, and was recently rejected by all her top choice colleges. She is enrolled for the fall at a State University in the desert southwest with no rowing program.

But boo hoo, right? She's happy again. Healthy. Passionate. Caring and Compassionate. She's heading into the next phase of her life with optimism and enthusiasm, rather than the sadness and depression that coincided with her constant preoccupation with "all things trans" ... which has now faded away.

So, HHS, I beg you to be cautious. Don't tell yourselves that doctors are making thorough evaluations of these gender-questioning kids, because most of them are not. Please don't ignore the mounting evidence that many kids, like mine, are desisting from a "trans" identity that was a phase with clear indications that internet influence and social contagion share some blame.

Please put some guard rails in place. Right now it feels like it is only parents who stand between their children and medical professionals who believe that *every* child who claims to be "trans" should quickly undergo experimental hormone treatments and irreversible surgeries, when what many of them need is good exploratory therapy, and just more time to grow and develop.

We could use a little help here. Thank you.