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| The Center  Inspired by a Captioned Image  By Maryanne Peters  Lee was my youngest son. A bit of an afterthought. My two older sons were in high school when he was born. My wife suffered after the pregnancy and by the time Lee started school, she was dead.  I suppose that I saw my wife in my youngest child. But then Lee became more and more like her. |  |

I now know that there are many fathers like me, who suffered the shock when their son tells them that they are transgender – that they feel that they do not belong in their own body but in the body of a female. It was confusing for me, so I understand how other fathers might feel.

I suppose those me go through all the worries that I had: What will happen to the child? Will he lose his friends? Will he get bullied or beaten up? Will he be sexually abused? And if he becomes she, will he ever be able to achieve a lasting relationship? Will it be with a man or a woman? Wil’ “she” ever be able to enjoy a family the way I have?

After the shock was over, it seemed a sad thing. All a parent wants is for their children to be happy. I decided to devote myself, and a good chunk of my considerable resources, to Lee’s happiness.

There was a place for transgendered people in our city. It was new and had been started by a few volunteers out a run-down community centre in a poor part of town. I went there with Lee to learn more about my son’s predicament. It was enlightening. The people were very kind to my son and fully supportive.

Almost immediately I suggested that I might be able to help. I had vacant space in a building in a better part of town which I offered to them. I ended up becoming even more involved in the Center than I had anticipated, but to me, what they were doing for Lee made it no burden at all.

Lee became Leigh. We celebrated by burning all her boy clothes on a bonfire over Thanksgiving with her brothers and their families.

Leigh’s High School had a transgender policy but no real idea on how to implement it. I was a donor to the school too, so they worked to the standard I expected in assisting Leigh in her transition. But the hard part was really up to her. I was proud of my new daughter. She took to the task with a smile that never seemed to fade no matter what.

I think that it helped that she had inherited my quick wit and sense of humor that could put down the abusers, but more than that, she had her mother’s good looks. It was truly startling the effect that she had on boys in particular. If they were determined to shun her, they could not. She was fascinating and alluring. And for girls, she became a style-leader I suppose you could call it. I gave her the money for interesting clothes and she had an eye for what looked good. Before long she had a firm circle of girlfriends.

And throughout it all she had the Center behind her, and me.

Perhaps being among those people gave me an appreciation that gender is not as firm a thing as most people believe. It is in fact, just a social construct. You can be born with a sexual form, and there are no just two of those, but gender is a presentation of yourself to the world. We are inclined to follow the gender closest to our physical form because that is what society expects. But what society expects is not always right.

One thing that was asked of heterosexual gender compliant people like myself, was whether I was able to cross the gender line. It was a challenge, and I was up for it. Leigh helped me, and some other fathers and boyfriends, with a fundraiser for the Center which we called “The Crossover Ball”. For the night I was Brenda. But out of deference to the people attending, I did not parade around as a drag queen. It was about presenting as another gender, not making fun of it.

I can say that it was an eye-opener for me, but even open eyes do not always see everything.

Lee’s example as a successful transwoman was an inspiration to others, including Charlotte. Here was a young man named Charles who had been struggling with his own demons for many years, but finally found that his problem was a gender one. Once he had pulled away the shroud that was Charles, there was a beautiful woman underneath.

Charlotte asked me if I could talk to her father, as a father. I agreed.

His name was Mark, and I suppose he reminded me of myself, or the way I had been before I had a better understanding. Like me, he was a wealthy widower, with a sadness that needed to be filled by somebody. He was disgusted by his own son, but there was no denying the love. That was something that we could build on.

When telling him about the Center, I explained who the people were, and to assist I found in my folder that I had a photo of the assembled team taken at “The Crossover Ball”. I pointed out the key people, and my lovely daughter Leigh, a young woman who had made her father very proud. In the photo she looked radiant.

“Who is this beautiful older woman over here?” he asked.

I felt strangely proud to tell him: “Oh that is Brenda. That’s actually me.”

“Are you trans too?” he asked.

“God no,” I said. “I was just a fund raiser. I don’t dress as a woman.”

“You should do,” said Mark.

I am not sure if I had ever blushed before in my life, but I blushed at those words. It really was the strangest feeling. I looked at Mark and he looked at me. I felt that he was looking at the real me, and that was not the person that I looked at in the mirror every morning.

After what seemed like a very long gaze, I asked him: “Would it help you if I did?”

That really was a very stupid question. How could looking at a man in a dress help him to understand what his son was going through?

“Would you?” he asked. And it was almost as if I wanted him to say those words.

I told Leigh that I had agreed to go on a date with Charlotte’s father dressed as a woman. She was as puzzled as I was, but she was excited too.

“You were great as Brenda at “The Crossover Ball”, but you could be even better as the real thing,” she said. I was a little unprepared for exactly what “the real thing” might be.

Having money and influence in a town makes you confident, I guess. I always felt that I did not have be concerned about what others thought of me, and that I could buy my way out of anything that might be embarrassing. So, I was ready to do this thing, even if I was still not sure why I was doing it.

It was not fear of embarrassment that drove me to perfect my mannerisms – it was respect for my daughter Leigh. I knew that evening though she was young, shifting from presenting male to presenting female had been an effort. I needed to match that.

“The starting point is not only to look female, but to feel female,” she said. “That means dressing from the skin. So get ready for a Brazilian.”

You have to understand how special my Leigh was to me. People might say that it was crazy to submit to this drastic makeover, but somehow Mark’s request had become a mission to share something special with my daughter. “The Crossover Ball” was a joke. This was a serious effort.

I was not overly attached to my body hair, but when it was all gone, I found the feeling quite exhilarating. I felt truly naked for the first time. A body is just something you walk around in, until you realize that every part of it is so sensitive. It makes the feeling of stockings and silk camisoles so unbelievably delicious that I wanted more.

Through contacts at the Center Leigh had bought me some breast forms and special latex panties designed to tuck away my genitals.

“You need to wear the panties every day until the date, and we are going to glue these breasts on so that you can live for a few days in a woman’s body,” said Leigh.

I had some appointments that I could keep wearing loose clothing. It did not seem an onerous thing. And I understood the purpose behind it. More and more it was becoming something about me and Leigh, and not about Mark at all. She was going to become a woman and I was trying to understand what that was all about.

With the breasts installed and the panties on, I found the instructions that I had received from Leigh much easier to follow. We had bought a peignoir set, which I wore around the house. It was a very old-fashioned thing I suppose, but very feminine. There was something about it that made me feel so very different. I found myself floating about my house as if I was a woman. It felt good. Somehow all movement as a man seemed like trudging from one labor to another, whereas a woman can float, with no particular purpose or destination.

On the day that I was to meet Mark as arranged, Leigh and I went in for a mother/daughter makeover at her favorite salon. We were both to get “the works”. A wig was not good enough. I would be getting extensions. My eyebrows needed to be shaped, but because of my concerns about appearing male the following day, it was agreed that this would be done in a way that my brows could be brushed to look more masculine.

I know that there are plenty of guys who get turned on by wearing women’s clothes. Having a transgender daughter and talking with others at the Center taught me about the difference between fetishes and genuine dysphoria. But I was not turned on by what I saw in the mirror. I just felt good.

I was surprised at how good-looking I was as a woman. I was glad, because somehow, I did not want to disappoint Mark. More importantly, I did not want to embarrass him. It struck me that his problem with his own daughter was that her femininity was somehow an attack on his masculinity. I did not want to embarrass him by looking like a guy dressed as a girl.

When I stood up in the salon and put on the dress and sensible heels that Leigh had picked out for me, I knew that I could do this.

That was the confidence I had when I arrived at the restaurant he had suggested – just late enough to carry suspense but not so late as to be impolite. I could see the intake of breath. It made me smile. I think that smile sent him even higher.

“You look fantastic,” he said.

“I don’t know why I am doing this.” That was my reply. I took my seat across from him, and he just looked at me.

“Thank you for doing it,” he said. “I guess my biggest concern for Charlie is that he will never have a proper relationship in his life. He is looking for a relationship with a man as a woman. I know that is not a gay relationship. But can a heterosexual man truly be attracted to a woman who was once a man? That is my concern. Then when I saw that photo – the one with you in it – with Brenda in it – I just wanted to know.”

“I think I understand,” I said to him.

“I believe that a good relationship is life fulfilling – don’t you. I loved my wife. When she died I was a wreck. All I want for my son, I mean my daughter, is that she can have a relationship as good as I did. Isn’t that what we want for our children? The best part of our lives?”

“Absolutely,” I said. “I agree 100 percent. I was lucky in love too.”

“Can it happen twice?” he asked.

“I hope so.” And then there was silence. We had been seated for less than a minute and we were just looking into one another’s eyes talking about love. A few days before I had been a man, and this would have been unimaginable. Now here I was, wearing a dress, with my hair done and my nails and lips painted, on a date with a man, talking about love.

The waiter broke the spell. We ordered wine and food.

I talked about Leigh. He talked about Charlotte. Neither of us mentioned our marriages and the past loves of our lives. It was not a subject until we were ready to leave.

He paid and I did not protest. He ordered a cab. I gave my address.

“I really enjoyed our time together tonight,” I said.

“Can we do it again?” he asked.

“I don’t do this … I don’t dress like this …”. I think that he could see that I was somehow troubled by the words.

He called out to the cab driver to change our destination to his place. Strangely, I did not protest. Somehow this man had taken control, and I liked that.

He opened the door for me, and I went inside. It was an impressive home.

“I am not sure why you have brought me here,” I said.

“I have never done this on a first date before, but I was hoping that we might be able to get to know one another more intimately.”

“You mean sex?” I said.

“If you would consider it,” he said, seriously.

“I don’t know how,” I said, honestly. “I don’t know how it would be possible.”

Wait a minute! I was not saying no. In fact, I was saying: “Yes, if only we could, but I don’t have a vagina for you to enter.” Then, to make matters even worse, or more complicated, or whatever – I felt burning hot tears in my eyes.

He kissed me. He took me in his arms and kissed me. I shuddered with delight. I yielded to him, to his touch and his tongue. Nothing felt so right.

“I think that you have answered my doubts,” he said as he held my face close to his. “A normal man can be attracted to a transwoman. He can want to be with such a person, for the rest of his life.”

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| I slept with Mark that night. There was no sex, but there was so much love that did not matter. Sex would require some changes, but I was now ready to make those changes. And with the help of the Center to guide me through, that is what I did.  The End  © Maryanne Peters 2019 | The new me, with Leigh |