

Daniel's Story

I am extremely proud and excited to tell my story and to, hopefully, encourage other female-to-males to come forward and to get the support that they may so desperately need, but are too afraid to ask for.

So it is with some trepidation, that I begin to write...

Let's start with a little background:

I had a happy early childhood. Memories of my childhood are very limited, but I do remember a functional family, full of love and adoration.

I adopted a tomboy dress code later on in life when I was old enough to make my own choices about what I wanted to wear and so my clothes were not chosen by Mum or Dad.

I hated the academic side of my school days but I had a very close circle of friends and, for the most part, they were happy days. It was during my time at secondary school that I had my first relationship with a girl. I didn't tell anyone about it and neither did she! Of course, friends and family worked it out for themselves, so let's call that intuition! The relationship was ended by her after a year or so. She was my first true love, and I was heartbroken.

I felt a strong need to conform to the 'norms' imposed by the society in which we live, and had a string of meaningless relationships with boys/men. I experienced some health issues and eventually consulted a specialist in the diagnosis and treatment of Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME for short) and was quickly diagnosed with the illness - sometimes known in those days as "yuppie flu". The symptoms were nausea, very little energy and feelings of depression and anxiety. I took a year off work to try to recover but the depression quickly accelerated. I was at home all day and felt a useless waste of space. I didn't know what direction my life would take and I was bitterly unhappy.

I met a guy some time later, and he seemed to be the answer to my prayers: handsome, intelligent, studying at university and doing a doctorate. He was supportive during these times, but had so much on with his studies that we became distant. Things did improve and we did love each other so I asked him to marry me. Happy times! Time progressed and it became very apparent that he wanted children. I absolutely did not want children! I had never nor never will have any maternal instincts.

You know what happens next - the end of another failed relationship! We remained friends but later we actually came out to each other as gay. So maybe we were kindred spirits?

I was still off work and on a slippery slope to losing my identity. I had a fraught relationship with my mum but she was only trying to help me get through my rough patch, trying her best to keep my spirits up and jolly me along. I just felt that she didn't understand. Resentment started to creep in.

Finally, I decided to 'come out' to my friends and family, to tell them that I was, in fact, gay and had always been so. I had just chosen to try to do the "normal thing". As always, my friends and family were very supportive of me, and told me that they already knew.

Life was reasonably happy, as I ended up with a girl that I really liked but who was not openly gay, which caused me frustration and anxiety. However, I was really upset when she ended the relationship abruptly but, deep down, I knew that she wasn't right for me. Still, I had feelings that something was not right. I didn't feel that I fitted into any of the standard tick boxes: gay/straight/ bisexual/transgender...

Feelings of having been born into the wrong body began to enter my head. Feelings that I had suppressed for many years. This was not 'normal'. I continued to have relationships with women because I knew that I felt happier in the gay role than the straight one. I always tended to take on the more 'butch' role. I fancied feminine girls, but actually ended up with some quite butch ones. Nothing made sense.

For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to stand to pee, like a man; I did not want sit like a girl anymore. This was a very strong feeling. I also wanted to be able to walk around without a top on. I had feelings of jealousy towards boys/men, as they had what I wanted. This was so unfair!

Why was I feeling like this and how would I ever begin to tell anyone? So I didn't, not for quite some time anyway. When I did tell a partner, it was after we had split up as I was scared of her reaction. I had never felt comfortable with my chest and knew that I didn't want to have breasts: I wanted a flat chest with nice pectoral muscles. I never felt suicidal over these feelings. I just knew that my body didn't feel right and that if I could have had one wish, it would be to change these things. I really didn't know what that involved with regard to surgery but I felt embarrassed and ashamed to even look it up on the internet.

At this time I had my third gay relationship: we lived together for around two years and I was quite happy, as I now knew that I preferred to be with women. True to form, I ended the relationship under a dark cloud of confusion and frustration. I then met a girl after the other failed relationships. We were together for a record in my book - five years! We had a civil partnership ceremony and after just 18 months of marriage, things changed. Yet another failed relationship! What was so wrong with me, why didn't anything ever work out? My thoughts go back to my inner feelings of gender dysphoria, although at that time I didn't know the official diagnosis nor the term for it.

I continued to try to bury these feelings. My relationship seemed to be improving with my mum, sharing a similar sense of humour. We then had a conversation about the depression I went through due to the ME and she told me that she had also gone through a rough patch a while ago and had been depressed after some surgeries that

she had undergone. This was a turning point for Mum and me. She admitted that she knew how awful I must have been feeling when I was going through my rough patch and we found some common ground.

I subsequently moved out of London and away from everything and everyone I knew, to begin a new life in Kent with a new girlfriend. We rented a house together for a while, but guess what - this relationship didn't work out either. Feelings of failure, unhappiness and uselessness were rife in my head! I was well aware of my failings and the effect that they had had on those around me, especially on my partners and people who loved and supported me. They gave me everything that I should have needed to feel happy, content and complete. Do you notice a pattern?

Along with feelings of failure, I also felt very alone. When relationships failed, I would quickly move to find someone else. It was a very strong urge to find happiness and companionship. I didn't ever give myself the time I so desperately needed to access my life, my feelings and just be at one with myself. I followed my usual pattern of searching for that companionship and met another woman. She was a very supportive, understanding, positive woman. Had I fallen on my feet? I felt comfortable enough to tell her my innermost secret of gender identity issues. Her reaction was one of support and encouragement. She was very inquisitive, as anyone would be. She tried to help me think about things and put them into some sort of perspective. She was happy to help me explore my feelings, suggesting we go to gay bars where it would be safe for me to explore my inner self. Somewhere I could dress the way I wanted to and be who I wanted to be, without any prejudice. But, once again, I chose to bury my feelings and didn't do anything to try to move things forward for myself.

At first, the relationship was a happy one. We became engaged because I loved her and I truly believed that she would allow me to be the way I wanted to be and that she would never hold me back. But, once again, because I had stuck my head in the sand, the relationship was bound to fail. Time went on and I became insular, non-communicative, selfish, reactive, and felt pressured to show love and affection to her, when that should have come naturally to me. I am generally a very tactile person, but when it comes to showing affection, the little things like hugs, holding hands and just saying those three words "I love you" became unnatural and a struggle. I began to lose touch with reality and with friends from the past. I tried desperately to keep hold of a few true friends from London, but even that became a struggle. I had, however, started to build up some close friendships with people in Kent. These new friends and the few from London are ones that I would call "friends for life".

My partner encouraged me finally to seek professional therapy. Not just for the gender issues, but to help me understand my feelings. She believed that there were deeply underlying problems with which I needed help. I agreed, as I knew that this was something that I should have done a long time ago. Sadly, things became quite bad for us, to the point of almost splitting up. I knew that I had to do something about this or I was going to lose her and the life we had built together. I needed to deal with my issues and my problems with long-term commitment. We took a relationship break for a month - probably the best thing we could have done, as we needed time and space away from each other. It was time to get the help I needed to move on with my life.

Phase one: A trip to my General Practitioner, with a view to a possible counselling referral and/or some antidepressants. I needed some help to deal with my daily struggles with gender, confidence, feeling that I am good for nothing, and coping with a job that I was unhappy doing.

The GP was a locum and somebody I had not seen before, but he listened to me and seemed sympathetic. He got me to fill in a brief questionnaire, presumably to decide if I was depressed and, if so, how badly. Once he had ascertained that I was not suicidal, he diagnosed moderate depression and gave me a prescription for antidepressants. He also referred me to a psychiatrist.

Phase two: Referral to a psychiatrist, culminating in a diagnosis of anxiety-related depression but not psychiatric problems.

Phase three: Referral to a psychologist for CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) and general counselling.

I had four sessions covered through private healthcare. Following these sessions, I was already feeling stronger, more confident and ready to further explore the deeper issue of my gender identity. I found the CBT to be very constructive and the support given by the psychologist was key to the acknowledgment of my gender identity issues. She armed me with the tools necessary to come to terms with, and deal with, my confidence issues. My homework was to research some support groups for transgender (trans) people. I was also to revisit my regular GP for a referral to the Gender Identity Clinic (GIC)

Phase 4: Appointment with GP for referral to the GIC

I wanted this poignant time in my life to be forever in my thoughts, so what better way to do this than have it etched onto my arm in the form of a tattoo. The inscription in Latin reads 'Ex Tenebris ad Lucem' which translates as 'Out of the darkness and into the light'. I don't think an explanation is needed.

I was curious at this point about whether I could find a site on the internet that sold some kind of prosthetic penis. I didn't know whether they existed, but I did a search under 'prosthetic penis to urinate through' and came up with one site, based in Singapore; the company manufactures and sells products for female to male pre-op transgender people. I was pleased and amazed that a site existed and I purchased a penis and a chest binding vest. I couldn't wait to receive my package (pardon the pun) and hoped that there would be no company identity on the packaging - how embarrassing would that have been!

It only took about 2 1/2 weeks to arrive - a long wait for me! But when it did, I was like a kid in a sweet shop, couldn't wait to get it open! I quickly skimmed through the instructions and put it on. WOW - what a difference a

bit of silicone can make! First things first, I needed to pee! This was the main reason for getting this device in the first place. I went for a pee and, inevitably, was a little overzealous and leaked. Oops! Next time I will know! I re-read the instructions in case I had put it in the wrong position? I hadn't - I just had to control the flow a little more. I couldn't wait to try it again! The next time was a little more successful. Aha! I think I have got the hang of it. Several pees later, I have all but mastered it. However, if I am bursting then it can present a little bit of a problem. The next challenge was to wear this all the time - day, night and at work as well! Thoughts of people's reactions flooded my head. Will anyone notice the bulge in my trousers? I purposely didn't order a large one as did not want it to be too obvious.

I will explain a little more about the prosthetic penis. It is made of a silicone-type material and looks reasonably realistic. It can be held in place with a harness or just held in your boxers. It is a three- in-one product, allowing the wearer to stand and pee, pack (as in wear in boxers) and also allows, with the aid of an erection rod, penetrative sex. It does what it says on the box!

I always believed the etiquette in the men's toilets would be not to look at another man's 'bits', but because I knew that the penis didn't look like a part of me, I thought men may question why I am using the men's room. This made the thought of using a men's urinal, extremely scary! But I was also really excited to be able to use them. To me, it was the epitome of masculinity to be able to stand and pee at a urinal. This has been the best purchase I have ever made and it has truly changed my life.

As I mentioned, I also purchased a chest binder from the same company as the prosthetic. A binder is a tight vest/top that is too tight for your normal size, but allows you to flatten your chest with little or no effort. These more recent binders replace the need to use constricting bandages which can be extremely dangerous, very inconvenient and difficult to use.

At this point in the journey, I am 75% to 80% sure that I want to start the process of transitioning fully from female to male. I am excited at the prospect, but worried about the consequences!

I was now starting to research more about being Transgender (Trans), looking at other people's stories on YouTube. I also purchased a book entitled *Transgender 101*. This book was of great value to me, as it explained in a very easy-to-understand way about what it means to be Transgender. It wasn't a story of anyone's life, but a factual analysis.

I looked online for sites that would give some information about the surgery I may face down the line. I found several sites with information and some detailed and very graphic pictures of surgery. This was informative but so scary! To think that I would have to go through all that, just to become someone that I should have been all my life. It just didn't seem fair to me. Why wasn't I born a boy? Doubts crept in: do I really want to go through all that? Could I ever be happy without it? Could I just live my life in my chosen role without this surgery? At this point, I was confused and slightly disturbed at the prospect of full transition.

Then I was introduced to a post-operative 'trans' man. His situation was slightly different to mine, in that when he met his partner, he had already begun the transition process. So his partner knew him as a man from the very start. I assume that this made things easier for him to continue on his chosen path. He is a great guy and answered every single question that I threw at him. I even asked for a sneaky peak at his top and bottom surgeries! This was purely to satisfy my curiosity and to educate myself a little more on the processes and of what to expect.

After meeting him, I was 85%-90% sure that this was the right decision for me. He allayed my fears and concerns and did everything he could to make me comfortable when talking to him.

In July 2012 my GP referred me to the local mental health team, so that they could make an assessment on me. They took a detailed history and then asked about future aspirations. This was to decide whether I was of sound mind and was competent to make the decision on transitioning. This is a very crucial and necessary step in the process. It was decided that I was of sound mind. (Little did they know of the underlying streak of madness that runs in our family, that was dutifully handed down the genetic line to me. When I say madness, I mean in a funny way, not in a psychiatric way!)

A few months passed and I hadn't heard anything at all about my referral to the Gender Identity Clinic (GIC). I made some enquiries and found out that they hadn't received a referral for me. This put me two months behind. After some digging, it was found, but nothing could be done to bump me up the list. I just had to wait!

At this stage I was starting to research changing my name by Deed Poll. I decided that it was the right time to take on a new identity and had already decided on the name that I would like. So in the early part of September 2012, I signed the legal documentation to enable this to happen. When I received my official Deed Poll Certificate, I was really happy, just to see on paper that I had been recognised as male and not female. It was a proud moment for me. It was confirmation to me that I had officially started my new life as Daniel. I started to send out certified copies to all the relevant authorities and companies with whom I have accounts. This process was extremely satisfying, especially when I received confirmation back addressed to Mr Daniel Canter.

Time passed and I still hadn't heard from the GIC. I decided to take matters into my own hands and start to research the possibility of seeing a Gender Specialist privately. I knew that it would be expensive, but essential to my already fragile state of mind. It felt as though the door to my future fulfilment and happiness was locked and that someone else held the key.

I found a clinic called Gendercare on the Internet, and so in the latter part of September 2012 I had my first consultation there. I was made to feel completely at ease when discussing my issues with the consultant

psychiatrist. He took his own very detailed history. After over an hour of history taking and the consultant answering my questions, he concluded that the diagnosis was definitely Gender Dysphoria.

What a relief - final confirmation and understanding of how I had been feeling. I have felt this way for so long but have never admitted it, not even to myself (let alone anyone else), that I wanted to be a man. I was 100% sure at this time that I wanted to transition completely from female to male. The consultant told me that he would be sending the notes of the consultation to the private Endocrinologist that works alongside Gendercare.

I made an appointment to see him at a hospital in Enfield. I was excited as the desired outcome would be to begin hormone treatment (Testosterone) or 'T' as it is commonly called. He concluded that he would definitely put me onto T, but I had to assure him that I had given up smoking; this is because men are at a higher risk of heart problems, etc. I had stopped weeks before, as the psychiatrist had already told me that I would have to do this.

So after a constructive lecture, he told me that he was happy to write me a prescription for the T and that I would need to be monitored closely whilst taking it. This would involve regular blood monitoring and re-check appointments. I left this consultation with really high spirits and a new hope for future happiness.

Now I'm beginning to accept the realities of my journey. I need to continue tentatively down my chosen pathway. I start to tell more and more people; neighbours, more friends and my boss at work. All of them reacted so positively which made me feel loved and cared for, and that, no matter what I did to change my body, they would be there to support me.

The chat with my boss was an eye-opener; she was great. She told me not to worry - they would not tolerate any bullying at work from my colleagues and they would make it as comfortable for me as they possibly could. We had a very light-hearted discussion about my transition, which made me feel comfortable and at ease, as I felt that I had her full support. She said that, with my permission, she would start the process of telling the other managers within the organisation.

With this release of my innermost feelings, I began to feel more confident and was able to smile at the prospect of living the rest of my life being happy. Don't get me wrong, I have, of course, been happy at times. But it was always with a large dark cloud hanging over me. Not being able to express myself in the right way has affected me in all parts of my life, from family relationships to partners and, maybe, even friends.

Following my disclosure, I have had an overwhelming amount of support, understanding and questions...boy, have

I had questions! If I could help to educate people a little on what it means to be Transgender, it would be something of which to be truly proud.

At this point both my partner and I began to have concerns about how my transition would affect our relationship. I battled with the fact that I didn't want her to go on the journey with me, because of the feelings of uncertainty post-transition. Transition posed so many unanswered questions for both of us! I also believed that it was not only my identity issues that were the cause of our problems. My own insecurities, sense of failure and lack of confidence most definitely played their part. Why couldn't I communicate with her? She had been nothing but supportive of me. I became selfish and all-consumed with my identity. We tried to continue with some semblance of a 'normal' relationship.

I went to the pharmacy to collect my testosterone. It was like holding a pot of gold in my hands. This little box containing 31 perfect little tubes of Testim gel (generic name for that particular brand of testosterone) was the key to my future!

I struggled with my image and with people's perception of my gender. I was sometimes called 'Sir', but people would often correct themselves once they realised or heard me talk. It embarrassed me when they corrected themselves. I would rather they have continued to think that I was a man. Children might say to their mother, 'that man over there'. The mother would then correct the child and say, 'no, that's a woman'. Sometimes I wonder about adults, as they perhaps don't give their children enough credit for having the perception or foresight that they themselves may lack.

But I really needed to talk to like-minded/ bodied people. I felt alone, in the sense that, I had such great support, but I needed that mutual understanding you get from people in the same situation. I was then introduced to The Beaumont Society, a support group for transgender people. I spoke to the director and she explained that the Society would love to encourage more female-to-males to the group but as yet, it was still a predominantly male-to- female group. She advised that it may suit me better to join a group with at least some female-to-male members. She told me to look up TG-Pals, another 'Trans' group and I talked to one of the partners who told me to come along to a meeting. I eventually plucked up the courage to go, and met some extremely wonderful people that night, not least the two partners of TG-Pals and a TG-Pals mentor. The numbers were again on the bias towards male-to- female: 27 male-to-female and 3 female-to- male, to be precise.

I am carrying on with my daily application of T. It is normally applied to the upper arms, or sometimes thighs. It has become a ritual and a dose is never missed. It gives me a sense of empowerment, something that I can control. It amazes me that this gel has the power to alter my mind and my body.

Unfortunately, the relationship that was already struggling took some further knocks and it was mutually decided that it would be better for both of us if we went our separate ways. Failure again! I knew that this woman had been paramount in my transition thus far and that I would have absolutely hated to lose her from my life altogether. We said that we would give each other some space and that, in time, we could continue to have a

friendship. My failures weighed heavily on my mind and the aforementioned depression started to crank up a gear or two.

I still haven't heard from the GIC regarding my appointment and, as I continue down the private route, I quickly realise I cannot afford to self-fund indefinitely. But fortunately, I was able to get another prescription on the proviso that I had some blood tests done. I awaited the results with anticipation; had this gel really been able to change the hormone levels? The results arrived: my testosterone (T) levels were at 20, which is, apparently, good so it is working!

Now, as time goes on, I am beginning to realise that continuation with self-funding was not going to be possible for much longer. I have now moved into my own flat and have become completely self-sufficient, which means that funds are tighter than ever. I contacted my GP to ask if she would take over responsibility for blood tests and prescribing of T. She said she would need a care plan from my consultant. As yet, I am still waiting to speak to her to ask her to do this.

I am now at the point where I am beginning to feel more self-confident with regard to self-image. I now regularly go out and about with the small patches of stubble on my chin that I have managed to cultivate. Ironically, I am called 'Madam' even more now, than pre-T. This amuses me greatly, but deep down, it hurts. It is as if people just cannot see the real me, even though from the outside, I think I conform to many of the prerequisites of being male. I have

the swagger, the clothes, the stubble and, possibly, the attitude?

I am enjoying and valuing the peer support I now have. These people have enriched my life in so many ways. I have enjoyed one-to-one time with one of the TG-Pals mentors and have also been out to a popular gay venue, for

a social get-together. This is the first time I have been out as Daniel. I have some questions, which are still unanswered but my conclusion thus far is still one of confusion, but with a general note to self: 'let it be'. I shouldn't place restrictions and boundaries on myself, it is not productive. For this journey is one of exploration, not rules.

It is a well-known saying that 'life begins at forty.' Well, I am nearly forty and I feel like my 'real' life is truly just beginning. This has been my story so far. I estimate that I am now approximately only a quarter of the way through my transition. The locked doors are beginning to be opened for me and I am looking forward to the next chapter in my life .

'I am a work in progress.'

Daniel wrote his story in 2013. It appears in Issues 82, 83, 84 and 85 of the Beaumont Magazine.