

Embracing a New Name

By Noah Walters

About 4 1/2 years ago I realized there was something off about me, I didn't feel like me. My name felt weird when said aloud and I never liked anything girly. This isn't to say people of any gender can't like "girly" things but to me it made me think I was different, which in my mind was a bad thing. My whole life I had been a girl and now I was starting to question why I didn't like being one. I started to see people with these same feelings online and how they transitioned to be a gender that makes them feel comfortable and to be honest it made me even more confused but it was a good start, letting me know that it wasn't the end of the world to feel so detached from my body. I spent lots of time thinking about it. I mean a lot of time. So much time in fact that I began questioning myself in mid-2020 and only concluded late 2022.

My mom is very supportive of me, and she always will be. However in the beginning I don't think she truly understood what it meant to be transgender. Mainly because of our situation since we didn't have the time or privacy to think about ourselves or speak up for each other. Her ex-boyfriend—who we'll call Robert—was a terrible man and when I first told my mom I didn't like being a girl and that I wanted to be referred to as they/them she tried her best. Robert though kept saying things like "Cameron? That's a stupid name," or "Nonbinary doesn't exist, just be a girl," and even going as far as to call me slurs behind my back when talking to my mom about my behavioral issues. He was awful and despite our best efforts, he followed us to Haslett once we moved. When we moved I realized that maybe Cameron wasn't quite right and that I wanted to try something new. At this

point, my mom had forgotten about the name and just went back to calling me by what was assigned to me at birth and it was hard to handle. I can't begin to count how many times I had cried and cried in the middle of the night wishing I could just shrivel up and run away somewhere where I could be myself. But when it came down to the idea of that though it was harder to imagine leaving this family who didn't know who I really was behind. No matter how much I would beg and sob or scream about how much I hated them I could never hold any actual anger towards them. Eventually, I had enough and when Robert wasn't home and it was just me and my mom, I told her.

We were sitting quietly in the living room very late at night, our furniture still packed away neatly in dusty boxes and the only entertainment we had were old VHS tapes running in a hand-me-down VCR that could've shut down at any moment. The smell of crappy take-out pizza and the feel of a new apartment was the only thing my mind could hold onto as I sat there in a silent panic, my heart in my throat, ready to cry, if she had asked me a question my answer would come out shaky and full of cracks. I was scared. I knew who I was and had known for so long but the thought of our relationship changing so drastically was frightening. She was always the first person I could rely on. The only person I trusted with this knowledge and I just hoped that Robert's narcissistic comments wouldn't taint her image of me so much that she would shut me out completely.

I cleared my throat and tried to speak, my thoughts running wild and everything around me became a dull blur. I opened my mouth and just as the words tried to come out my mind blanked. I couldn't speak. No matter how hard I tried the words, "Hey Mom," wouldn't fall out. It took me forever to speak up and say something. It was so quiet I thought I'd have to repeat myself, even though she heard me very clearly.

“Hey Mom, do you remember when I told you I didn’t like being a girl?” Her face gave away her initial feelings, scrunched eyebrows, and that kind of confused annoyed expression a mom makes when you tell her you had gotten in trouble at school. It made me nervous to keep talking but it was already too late and my feelings came rushing out too fast to catch them. “I still feel like that but, different? I don’t want to be a girl, I’m a boy and my name is Noah. I’ve been wanting to tell you for a long time but I just didn’t know when, you know? I know it’ll be hard to adjust but it’s who I am so..”

As I was talking my voice kept getting softer and softer out of embarrassment, I don’t know why I was embarrassed. It wasn’t wrong to stick up for myself in a moment like that but the fact that I was so sure of it and stern with what I was saying made me think I was being rude or angry. I just needed to get it out before I shut down.

That moment still feels like a blur so I can’t remember what all she said back to me but I know that her initial reaction wasn’t what she was actually thinking. She was trying to process it in a way that didn’t make me out to be a bad person. She handled it better than I thought, especially because of Robert and the uncertainty of it all. And after a few days she started calling me Noah.

The difference between how I feel about my name is huge. My birth name always filled me with an unexplainable feeling of dread or fear or some sort of anxious feeling, but when I was being called Noah—back when it was new and fresh—it made me so unreasonably happy that I couldn’t contain my smile whenever it was said aloud. Now that I’ve gotten used to it it just feels like me. I feel like me! And I know that’s a strange thing to be happy about but after years of feeling like an outcast and a freak for not

enjoying womanhood as much as I was told I had to, I could finally let out a breath I'd been holding in for so long and start to do what I wanted to do.

If you go your whole life pursuing a talent that you have no interest in you'd eventually begin to question why you ever picked it up in the first place. So naturally you'd want to change it, try something new, and let your heart tell you what you want, right? There's no reason to keep doing something you hate. There's no reason you should feel obligated to suffer through a moment of your life just because it's not what other people are doing. You'll find people who're just like you, who are proud of who you are, and hope to see you accomplish great things in your life. You'll also find many many people who despise your existence, bully you, misgender you on purpose, spread your birth name around the school like a dirty secret to call you behind your back, fetishize you for being different or exotic, treat you like a baby who needs to be coddled and shunned from the world, and in some cases try and get you and the people who support you killed. The only thing to do at that point is not to ignore it, but to speak up for yourself. No matter how long it takes you to find your voice. No matter how quiet you get after telling the world that you're proud of yourself. Being true to yourself and showing empathy for others is one of the most incredible things someone can do. It can lift up those who are too scared to stand up and tell their mom they don't really like who they are just yet.