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Parenting Sideways

My Children Have Accepted This Journey Better Than Anyone Else

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from Jayke Burgess blog "Jayke's TransAm"



... my children have accepted me for who I am ...

It is 2005; I am twenty-six years old, we are announcing to our close friends that we are pregnant with our daughter. I feel a sense of excitement and a new found lack of freedom.

"Are you going to grow a beard"? "Why are you a boy with a girl's body" "Are you going to get your boobs cut off?"

Our friends are excited for us, and ask lots of questions. At this point, my partner and I appear as a lesbian couple, the friends we are sharing this with are also a self-identified lesbian couple. One of the questions they ask is, "So, what do you want to be called as a parent?"

My partner responds quickly with "mum", and I naturally respond, without thinking, "dad".

This should have been an eye opener for me.

But, it wasn't. It just felt right to me to be called dad. It felt natural; like it was the name my children would call me. Yet, here I was, a self-identified bisexual in a seeming lesbian relationship, wanting to be called "dad".

Was I bowing to peer pressure, to conform to heteronormative roles and becoming the "masculine mother" or was I just trying to make my choice of family acceptable to my Pentecostal family?

The answer is, I just could not see me. I was flying in the face of rejection of my sexuality, to add to the ever increasing basket of shame, being me, no I could not do it. It was not an option, I couldn't manage any further heartache, any further pain.

My children don't call me dad. I became paranoid about people misunderstanding this in 2005 and instead chose "mamou", the Greek name for mother.

Fast forward five years, I am beginning my process of coming-out to my family, my home, as me. Will they accept me? No. Will they hate me? No. I am transgender, female-to-male, gender-queer and bisexual.

I didn't come-out as transgender till 2009. I didn't act on this by transitioning till 2010. I have two children, a thirteen-year-old son and a four-year-old daughter. They are amazing creatures, and I love them passionately. I have never biologically parented a child; my ex-partner gifted me with two wonderful children.

My Son

My son is a quiet, strong, funny, compassionate, gifted, intelligent child who watches people but doesn't give his opinion and is not prone to passionate conversation. He seamlessly disappears in to the background when he chooses to, excelling in the forefront at whatever he puts his mind too.

I decide to out myself to my son, a thirteen-year-old brilliant sunshine of a boy. We are rumbling, and having a laugh, when I turn and say "My boy, I need to tell you something. I'm transgender and will begin transition". My son is quiet for a moment, looks at me through innocent, accepting eyes and says "So, we will be going through puberty together. That means I get to tease you about your voice breaking too!"

My heart had prepared for anger, fears, rejection, confusion, sadness, and all I received, was love and a swift tackle as I fall backwards in the next stage of our rumble.

My Daughter

My daughter is loud, passionate, a person in her own right, knows her own mind and will not be swayed, only allows you in as much as she chooses, is creative, gifted, intelligent, funny and a little bit of a fantastic nut bag. She demands to be heard and will not sway her

opinion without time and a good argument. I am envious of her courage.

From the age of one to one-and-a-half my daughter has continually questioned my gender. She is extremely intelligent and is able to pick up nuances in people and situations. She has wondered about my gender without me having a clear answer for myself. She has picked up my inability to feel comfortable in the role of female, and put question to my doubts about my gender.

When I spoke with my daughter and told her I was a boy in a girls' body, she responded with silence and then a question. "So, you ARE my dad". She has some confusion around the concept that we taught her that she has two mums. So she has dubbed me "mamou, my dad".

Translation

My daughter, who is now four-years-old calls to me over the wall from another cubicle in the women's toilets at the cinema, people are milling around waiting in line, all the cubicles are filled.

"Mamou, my dad, why are you in the girl's toilet? You are a boy!"

I laugh, at the imperfect timing of my four-year-old wonder. How do I express this to an innocent four-year-old mind? I ask her "Do I look like a boy". She laughs and says "Mamou, my dad, you look kinda like a boy, but a girl." I explained that when I look like a boy I will use the boys' toilets. She laughs and tells me I am crazy, I should just use the boys' toilets now, because I am a boy. She makes my heart smile.

Parenting

As a parent, I have always taken on the strong parent, who has a rumble, but will protect you when life gets tough, kind of role. Being transgender has been a blessing because I have been socialised female, and so understand my daughter. But, I am a man, so understand my son. I am able to offer my children an environment that teaches tolerance, acceptance and love of all people. I can teach them that there is no such thing as different, because what is "the same" or "normal"?

My son is thirteen, so he has spent twelve years understanding me as a female. Yet he accepts me without reservation. I feel that now that he understands me better, he actually knows how to communicate with me. I have seen positive change in our relationship. I've noticed this in quite a few relationships; people can communicate with me better now.

My daughter asks a lot of questions. "Are you going to grow a beard?" "Why are you a boy with a girl's body" "Are you going to get your boobs cut off?"

Some of these questions I can answer, some I find difficult to explain to a four-year-old mind, in a way that won't distress or harm her. When she asked if I will get my "boobs cut off", I said yes and explained that the doctor would do it.

She asked if she could have them when she grows up, will it hurt, and then that night had a dream about it that distressed her. The mother of my children and I are not together and some questions they want to ask are fielded through her and sometimes she answers them. Sometimes, she comforts their sadness at change. But, on the most part, my children have responded well.

My children will and are mourning the loss of their understanding of me as a female and a mother, but they are able to see the joy, confidence and contentedness I have found in being truly my whole self.

I have been lucky, my children have accepted me for who I am, and are allowing my journey to unfold without reservation. My children have accepted this journey better than anyone else who has chosen to be a part my journey. My children understand that I am still me.

Me

2010 is a good year to come-out. It is my year. I now have a home for the person inside and it is called me. I no longer need to pass as a female, I can relax and just be ...

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