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Testimonial from the Partner of an F.T.M.

Valuable Lessons of Love and Happiness

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I've learned some valuable lessons about what love is, who I am and what makes me happy.

I've been inspired by the determination of my F.T.M. partner Kas, (or Cameron when he's in trouble), to submit this piece to *Polare*. It's the story of his journey through my eyes, and I suppose it's a bit of a love story too.

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Okay, I was desperate, I placed a personals ad in a lesbian magazine. Turns out, it was the best thing I ever did. At the ripe old age of thirty, after three weeks of phone chat and with the worst case of nerves in the history of blind dates, I've met the person I've now chosen to spend the rest of my life with.

Given the circumstances, I was expecting to meet a girl. The person on my doorstep then had a girl's name, but that was where the similarity ended. What I didn't know at the time, as I took in the sparkly eyed smile and proffered bunch

of red flowers, was that this thoughtful, generous, open and friendly tomboy had already begun the transition from female-to-male through hormone treatment.

Kas was very "masculine". I hate resorting to gender stereotypes but bear with me! Kas had always (from the age of three or four) resembled a boy, physically and mentally. With heavy heart, with neither apology nor faltering resolve, Kas told me of his transgender status early on. I'm ashamed to admit (it seems outrageous now) that I had trouble contemplating a future with him. The possibility of sharing my life with a man was an unexpected turn of events, which caused me to wrestle with my own sexuality and experience a sense of loss. And I don't think I held any prejudice towards transgendered people, but to share my life with one? Visions of tabloid cover stories sprang to mind - was this the life I wanted for myself? For my children? What would my family say?

Mum guessed before we told her. Matter-of-factly she asked if Kas would prefer to be male - so the whole story poured forth. She was full of curiosity, we gave her some literature on the subject, and now she's quite the transgender spokesperson! It was Mum who christened Cameron - she phoned at some ungodly hour: "I've thought of a new name for Kassie"! It was a very exciting time for Cameron receiving a new driver's license and other identification, not to mention the first time that properly addressed mail arrived.

With much biting of nails, a letter was dispatched to my father who invited us to visit. Telstra and Australia Post have been doing very well out of us since, with another holiday planned for the end of the year. It did my heart a world of good to see Kas and my father bonding over a bottle of beer. And Kas' totally cool and groovy grandmother has spread the word around his side of the family. Nan is understanding and supportive of Kas in his transition. She often recalls how he behaved as a young child, which corresponds to his early memories of feeling trapped in the wrong body (the oh-so-true cliché).

It's now obvious to me that the most important aspects of our relationship (mutual respect and support, communication, shared goals, fun etc.) have nothing to do with gender. Since meeting Kas and getting to know him I've learned some valuable lessons about what love is, who I am and what makes me happy. I've learned that a person is more than the sum of their body parts. I've never been happier, I'm so in love, and the gender issue is no longer of any relevance.

Last Anzac Day, Kas asked if I would marry him. Apparently I took a while to answer, but I was just enjoying the moment! There's no way I could ever change my mind and not marry him - Mum lost her son, and in some way they fill a bit of that gap for each other. Kas calls her "Mum" (or gorgeous one - "G'day handsome" she replies).

Kas has transitioned at work, surprisingly with few hitches, his colleagues making an effort to get the pronouns (he, him, his) correct. He's had to replace a whole wardrobe of work clothes and is the proud owner of eight ties! It's still not safe to send him shopping on his own though, as he'd head straight for Best & Less! Men!

In retrospect a lot of things seem like a breeze, but the journey has been very, very daunting at times. For me the hardest times have been knowing the pain and frustration of my partner and seeing the hurt in his eyes at times when rejected. The worst trepidation I felt was the morning Kas left for work to face his planned "coming-out" day - but within hours (after the deed was done) my pride in him was exhilarating. I would attribute our transition "success story" to these factors:

- Our fabulous family and friends, and some key individuals at Kas' workplace.
- Anti-discrimination legislation (and those who have worked towards it).
- The support of the Gender Centre, particularly Elizabeth and Sean and other transgendered people who have bravely paved the way.
- Communication and honesty always, with each other and those around us; and
- Kas' unwavering vision and positive mental attitude.

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