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When Genes Don't Fit

Grappling with My Intense Feeling of Really Being a Male

by Bob Roehr, The Sunday Journal, (Prince George's County, Maryland, U.S.A.)

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Kitt Kling comes to the door of his home in Greenbelt, Md. A dark beard and a thatch of grey hair frame his face, a large frame, and a middle-aged gut lurk behind a charcoal sweater. He knew that he was different from about the age of five or six, but "there was no way to explain to anybody, I didn't have the words for a long time."

... Finally there was someone who knew what she was talking about when she said, that she felt like a male

"When I was a teenager, I knew I felt like a guy. Or at least, that was the only way I could think of it to myself. Yet I knew that biologically I wasn't. My physical attractions for the most part were to women. My feelings about myself were that I'm male. Well I guess I'm a lesbian. So I came to grips with that fairly easily."

"I could be the tomboy, I could be the first female in my high school to take auto mechanics (in 1968), things like that. Fortunately it was at a point where women's Lib. and the women's movement was just starting to open up."

Kitt joined the Army and became an air traffic controller, a career she continued as a civilian in Alaska. She faced sexual harassment on the job, a drunken supervisor literally chasing her around the desk.

And all the while she was grappling with "my intense feeling of really being a male." She coped with stoic resignation, "This is the body I've got, I'll make the best of it, do what I can."

Kitt wanted to have a child. "One of the only times of my life when I actually felt happy about being a female was when I was pregnant," he says. "I felt happy, comfortable, physically pretty good. It was a nice feeling of accomplishment. There is something really cool about creating a life." She breast fed Samantha, who turns seventeen this month.

The Change

Kitt met Jessica Xavier at a new job in late 1990. Over the ensuing weeks they shared confidences, Kitt that she was a lesbian, Jessica that she was born male but had recently gone through gender reassignment surgery and was living as a transgendered woman.

It was a revelation for Kling. Finally there was someone who knew what she was talking about when she said, that she felt like a male. Jessica "was able to steer me in the direction I needed to go to find my answers," he said.

Kitt began seeing a therapist who specialised in gender issues. The following year she began hormone therapy and began living as a man.

Things went smoothly at work. Then ten-year-old Samantha handled it well at home, aided by monthly visits to a therapist to head off any problems. But Bev, Kitt's girlfriend of several years could not. She was a lesbian and could not live with the man Kitt had become. She moved out.

Kitt's mother reacted with horror, She had accepted rather easily the earlier news that her daughter was a lesbian. But this was different, now she tried to take Samantha from Kitt.

Maryland child protective services came knocking at the door when Samantha was fourteen. The complaining party's name and address had been obscured with a black marking pen, but "I knew just by the wording that it was her" says Kitt. "You don't grow up with someone, especially someone for whom English is a second language and not recognise it, "I know my mom's syntax," Interestingly enough, the gender change was never a big issue (with child protective services). "They knew, they were obviously very concerned at first, but it was nothing they focused on."

The neighbours were supportive and Samantha was happy and doing well in school. All the lengthy investigation turned up was that Samantha had once tried pot and Kitt knew nothing about it, that was enough to land the parent on a central registry that keeps him from working with kids.

Medical Emergency

"I felt a crushing pain in my chest, I thought I was having a heart attack," Kitt says recounting an incident two years ago at work. Yet that fear was countered by an even greater fear, one of discovery. His boss was "a good old boy type" who did not know that Kitt was transgendered. And knowledge of the Tyra Hunter incident burned bright in Kitt's mind, how would the ambulance crew react when they

discovered breasts bound down beneath the suit coat and dress shirt? "I sat there and thought to myself, god. What do I do now? Do I go to my boss and tell him I have to leave, and hope I make it to the doctor's office? Do I call for an ambulance and risk my shirt being opened?"

I just lied. I told him that my doctor was right down the street. Fortunately it wasn't a heart attack.

Kitt found other ways to cope with smaller everyday challenges in life. He avoided the shower at the pool by telling the staff he had "some unusual physical problems" and kept his shirt on while the kids (where he was teaching at a summer computer camp) played in the water. In February (1998) he had chest surgery, "It was a very liberating thing, I got over a lot of fear and anxiety. He enjoyed last summer in just a t-shirt.

"We do make kind of an unusual family, and yet, we are not really all that unusual," says Kling. "We have the same struggles that everybody else has. His girlfriend Remy owns a business. There are days when we think, it is time to sell off the equipment. I'm going on college tours with my daughter and we are trying to figure out where the scholarship money is going to come from, like everybody else is."

I know that it was a difficult path for me to follow and finally find the right end spot for me" says Kitt. "I'm comfortable now,"

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