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## Call Me Stephanie

Stephanie

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**M**y story is not unique. It's not even unusual. I am not a celebrity. I am unlikely to be feted by the media, but neither will I be pursued and abused by paparazzi. Because of these facts you may find we have more in common than if I were on every magazine cover on every news stand and negotiating for my own reality show.

*For the first time I had a path laid out for me and I could clearly see my future as a woman in society.*

Although my wish to be female probably goes back much earlier, the first times I can remember doing anything about my transgender obsession were during my time in high school in the 1970s. I would dress up after school, borrowing female gear wherever I could. Only my mother knew about my cross-dressing and her attitude was ambivalent.

On the one hand she didn't try and stop me from 'dressing up', but on the other hand she tried to control what I wore, and would criticise me for wearing 'unsuitable' clothing. There was one skirt I loved but my mother said it was too short for a person my age. But it was my favourite so I kept wearing it until it literally fell apart from overuse.

When I started work I could not have been more masculine in my choice of careers. I understand this is a fairly common trait among transgenders, who often go into high risk, hyper-masculine employment to demonstrate to themselves (and the world at large) that they are not sissies and can hold their own in a masculine dominated world.

I was in the army for some time, then became an ironworker in a shipyard. From there I moved into concrete finishing work for the Council and by the time I was in my twenties I was on the gully-truck, clearing waste and keeping the Council drains and waterways clear and also clean.

Throughout this time I was still cross-dressing, but limiting myself to dressing up at home.

I had an industrial accident that injured my back early in 1994 and I was placed on light duties but the injury never came good and by 1996 I was invalidated out of my Council employment. I started to cross-dress more after this time and by 1997 I was in touch with the Gender Centre, where I met Elizabeth Riley, the Manager. Elizabeth treated me well and I learned a lot from her. For the first time I had a path laid out for me and I could clearly see my future as a woman in society.

The other Gender Centre Elizabeth Riley, the Counsellor, counselled me in 2000 and 2001 and about that time I changed doctors and started hormone therapy after consulting Professor Alfred Steinbeck on the best hormones. I prefer now to use patches rather than pills, as the hormones are absorbed through the skin, which is much kinder to the liver. I have been using hormone patches (two a week) since 2003.

I have come out to my family, including my brother and his children. I have never married so that I have not had the problems of reconciling my new personality with sons or daughters.

I am sometimes asked what my social life is like and where I find my friends. I tend to go to places where gays and lesbians are welcome, and most of my friends are gay. The rest are straight although I have a few transgender friends. When the Taxi Club was operating I used to go there often, but now I go to hotels and clubs that are sometimes less welcoming than the old Taxi Club used to be.

I am happy living in my preferred gender role, and I dress conservatively these days (even my mother would approve). I hope that all those with whom I share my experience will find their life journeys as rewarding and fulfilling as I am finding mine.

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The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.