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Letter from America

Life Doesn't Get Much Better

by Paula Dayne

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I have met the perfect man, I'm more in love with him every day, and I am constantly thinking how lucky I am in my life.

At this time of the year I can't imagine anywhere else I'd rather be than right here, in Southern California.

I'm sitting here in my beautiful two storey home in the leafy suburbs. Outside is a garden full of plants and trees and the warm weather is bringing out the scent of the flowers. My husband Chris has just called me to tell me he loves me and misses me and can't wait to get home from work. Life is very good and we have everything the modern American home could possible need; a large house, two new cars, two cats and a house full of laughter and love.

I could work if I want to, but Chris isn't bothered if I stay at home now. He earns more than enough for both of us and besides, I'm planning a solo trip to Australia in August and Chris found out today that a proposed trip to London is on for next month. We'll be spending two weeks there, courtesy of his company.

Everything I have ever wanted has come to me, every wish has been granted, every door has been opened. I have to be the luckiest girl in the world.

Is this a fantasy? No, this describes exactly this very moment. Life doesn't get much better I can tell you that. Not bad for a post-op transsexual girl from Sydney who once thought there was very little in the future to be happy about!

It wasn't always like this of course. So much happened in between that brought me to this point, so let me give you a short background.

I transitioned in June 1995 and proceeded to surgery in Montréal Canada in October 1997. I've been very lucky and life has mostly been very positive for me.

My surgery was an absolute success, and to this day I have never had a single concern or problem. post-op, I dated and enjoyed myself and life was certainly better than it had been. I was sharing a house with Caroline Layt near Camden and we were (and still are) the best of friends.

My family were "barely tolerant" of my transition, but I eventually accepted that the family dynamic had changed forever and stopped fretting over it. Work wise, I'd been employed by the same government department since 1994 and had in fact transitioned whilst on the job.

For the most part, my transition there had been uneventful. Almost everyone was just fine with me. There were of course one or two exceptions, which at the time seemed of major significance, but which in hindsight were nothing more than blips. The blips however, ultimately provided the impetus I needed to move onwards and ultimately upwards. Thinking back now, I'm glad these less than helpful people gave me the opportunity to move on and leave them far behind. Anyway, there was little possibility for promotion and the position was most certainly not one in which I wanted to spend too much of my working life. I guess I was just waiting for an excuse to leave.

So in mid-1999, I booked a holiday to the U.S.A. for two months. Maybe a change of scenery and some time off work would make things clearer. I flew to L.A. in June 1999 and met up with two transsexual friends called Fran and Jeanne, whom I'd met on the Internet ages ago. They were marvellous to me and we all had such a great time. We toured all over the West Coast, down as far as Mexico and as far north as Edmonton, Canada. It was actually at the beginning of that trip that one of the most important events occurred.

Indeed, I'd say I just stumbled across it. I was staying at Jeanne's house in L.A. and just goofing around on the Internet. I found a job search web site where you look for positions in your field of expertise. I idly typed in my job description, never expecting anything to come up as I work in a very narrow field of electronics. Imagine my surprise when I was presented on-screen with a job opening in Chicago, Illinois. No special qualifications needed, immediate opening, apply now.

To cut a long story short, I applied for the job, they flew me from the West Coast to Chicago (first class hotel and limo, thank you very much!) and they offered me the job on the spot. The rest as they say, is history. They helped me get the relevant work visa and in January 2000, I moved to Chicago and began work there. I loved it. Chicago has to be the most brilliant city in the U.S.A.. I fell in love

with the Chicago Cubs baseball team and the city itself. Caroline Layt visited me in June 2000 and we had just the best time ever travelling around northern Illinois and into Indiana and Michigan and watching the Cubbies win against the New York Mets.

During my time in Chicago, I continued to have a fairly good social life. I joined one or two social clubs in the area and went on a number of dates. Mostly they didn't work out although they were interesting in their own way. It's always nice to experience another culture.

In mid 2000, I received an email from a guy I'd actually corresponded with previously, although we lost touch well before I'd left Australia. He knew of my past, although we didn't mention it much. I like that approach. My being transsexual isn't something I talk about all that much either, unless it's relevant. He was very surprised (and pleased) to learn I was now living in the U.S.A. and our emails soon graduated to two-hour-long phone calls. We realised we had a lot in common and in March 2001, he flew from California to Chicago to meet me for the first time.

I must have made an impression upon him, because the day after he arrived, he got down on one knee and proposed. It was quite a romantic moment. Although I had actually only met him in person the previous day, we had in fact known each other for about four years, so I felt I knew him very well. I accepted his proposal. As a matter of fact, he even proposed again two weeks later when we were visiting the Queen Mary in Long Beach. He is a hopeless romantic and I love it. Our idea of a good night is watching a romantic movie at home with a glass of wine and snuggling together. I've never been one for nightclubs so that suits us both.

We were married in Las Vegas on 9th June 2001 and it was wonderful. Everything went absolutely right. I wore a beautiful long dress (I'm assured the colour is called periwinkle, a blue-mauve) and Chris looked so handsome in his new suit. The service and the minister were brilliant and my wedding was everything I had ever dreamed about. It took about an hour or so and we were whisked back to our hotel in the middle of Vegas. That night we saw Tom Jones in concert. Just excellent!

And so we are back in the present. Here it is 2002 and we have been married a year. Not only that, I now have an instant family. They have all taken me to their heart for which I'm grateful and I just naturally clicked with them all. Chris and I have never felt the need to tell them of my past.

In over two and half years in the U.S.A., my past has never come back to haunt me. That is such a wonderful feeling. The only folks I have ever told in all this time have been U.S. Immigration (that's the law folks!) and my family doctor. Oh I nearly forgot to mention; I'm also taking flying lessons here and hope to become a professional pilot in the next few years, something I could never have dreamed of in Australia. It's the most wonderful feeling piloting a light aircraft through the sky.

Life is so good for me. There is little reason for me to ever return to Australia now, unless perhaps we both decide at some point in the future we'd like to retire there. I have met the perfect man, I'm more in love with him every day, and I am constantly thinking how lucky I am in my life. Professionally and personally, it's all working out. Chris and I are living happily in our house on the coast of California, I've had my final interview with U.S. Immigration and have my Green Card at last. Everything I have ever wanted has come to me, every wish has been granted, every door has been opened. I have to be the luckiest girl in the world.

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