

May 29, 2012

Dear Mom and Dad,

I'm writing to you about something very important to me and it would mean a lot to me if you could read through this letter.

For some people, gender can be weird. I've been mulling over my own gender since I was around 13 or 14. While going through puberty is probably not comfortable for anyone, for me in particular, it felt disconcerting. It felt like the changes that were going on weren't really meant for me. I wasn't initially familiar with the idea that people could be transgender, but once I learned of that and read more about it at the library and on the Internet, I thought to myself, "That's it. That's what I feel like."

Those thoughts tumbled around in my head over the next twenty years. A point of reflection came to me over the course of those week-after-week business trips to Springfield, Illinois, in the spring of 2010. The town is barely big enough for a Dairy Queen so once the workday came to a close and I walked back to my hotel room, there wasn't much else to do other than to think. I don't remember the specific date when I accepted that I was transgender, but I remember sitting on my hotel bed with my back propped up against the wall and thinking to myself, "Yeah. I am transgender."

The implications of that realization took a couple weeks to sink in and it was around June that year when I found myself asking, "Would I be mad at myself if, ten years from now, I hadn't done anything about this?" Thinking about it in those terms, I could only concede that, "Yeah, I would be mad at myself if I hadn't done anything about this in ten years."

As you may remember, that fall, I came out to both of you. I also came out to my friends in Dallas. I came out to Adrian over the holidays that year and, in the months following, I came out to my extended group of friends and started coming out to my coworkers. Over that summer of 2011, I came out to my colleagues in Dallas and that August I started making arrangements to transition at work.

Transitioning hasn't been a walk in the park, but it has renewed my faith in humanity — nearly everyone I've come out to has been overwhelmingly welcoming and accepting. While I may not have been an outwardly unhappy person before, I can say without doubt that I feel happier now than I ever have. Looking back over those years before my transition, my clothes had felt like wearing a costume; going through life had felt like I was playing the part of someone else. It's been eight months since I began living full-time in October — living in the world as a woman and my only wish is that I had started my transition earlier.

While the name "####" can be used for persons of either gender, it's typically more of a man's name than a woman's name. After many months of thought and many hours combing through lists of names, I chose the name "Ashley." One of the things that appeals to me about the name is that while "Ashley" can be a name for either gender, people more commonly think of it as a woman's name. (I suppose it has some symmetry with "####" in that way — it too can be used for either gender, but is more often associated with one gender than another.)

While I realize that habits can be difficult to change, and while I know this is an ongoing process, it hurts me when someone I've come out to calls me ####. At the barbecue I had during your visit in October, I felt mortified when you would call me #### in front of my friends, especially among my friends who had only known me as Ashley. The postcards you've sent from your trips to South Africa and the Cayman Islands have had gorgeous pictures but I haven't been able to bring myself to read them; the "Mr. #### #####" they're addressed to feels like a person who used to live here. When someone calls me Ashley, it shows that they respect me and accept me for who I am. All of my friends and colleagues call me Ashley. I would like you to call me Ashley as well.

You've known me as #### for a long time, and I realize it can be difficult to adjust to calling me Ashley and using female pronouns such as "she" and "her" to refer to me, but I would like you to try. I don't mind at all that you sometimes call me "Snooks-Pooks," but when you don't choose to call me Snooks-Pooks, I'd like you to call me Ashley. I can accept that you might occasionally slip up at first; I'll offer a gentle reminder when you do, but what's important to me is that you try. I may have begun my transition about two years ago, but I know in my heart that I've always been transgender. This is who I am. I'm Ashley.

Love,