

May 27, 2013

Dear Mom and Dad,

I'm writing to you about my gender, and it would mean a lot to me if you would read through this letter.

Being transgender isn't a walk in the park—it's not something I'd wish on anyone. And the worst part is the gender dysphoria that comes with it. Gender dysphoria is the internal distress that transgender people feel from the dissonance between their sense of gender and the body they live in. My dysphoria has always been there, but some stretches have been worse than others—I've had some months where I felt like I was wearing shoes that were two sizes too small, while other months have felt like a serenade of claws against a chalkboard.

My transition hasn't stamped out my gender dysphoria entirely—but gosh has it helped. In the years before my transition, I always had this feeling that something wasn't quite right, and it took me a long time to figure out what it was. I've been on hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for about two and a half years, and I can't tell you how much happier I am these days. I know now that this is what life is supposed to feel like. And I also know that in the unlikely and hypothetical event that I ever had to un-transition—to go back to the way things were before—I don't think I'd be able to go on living.

These days, when I buy groceries at the store and the clerk asks me, "Would you like paper or plastic, ma'am?" that just feels right. When one of my coworkers remarks to another, "Oh, she sent along some code to take care of that," I feel that I belong. But when someone refers to me with male pronouns, my gender dysphoria comes flooding back—and it feels like the wind has been knocked out of me. And it hurts every single time. But I'm also thankful that those experiences are a rare thing these days—I think the last time anyone in Dallas called me by my former name or referred to me with male pronouns was about fourteen months ago.

I've always had a soft spot for "Snooks-Pooks"—it's a lovely nickname. It's affectionate and playful, and for all I know, I might be the only person who has that nickname. But being as personal and whimsical as it is, I'm not sure that you're referring to me as Snooks when you're talking with people like aunts or uncles or other family friends. I get the feeling that you might be calling me Snooks when I'm in the room but calling me ##### once I'm out of earshot. And I worry that if you call me ##### or refer to me with male pronouns when you're talking to other people, they might feel confused about which name or pronouns they should be using for me.

It's time for you to start calling me Ashley. I know that it's a big adjustment, but it's my name, and it's what everyone else calls me. Snooks-Pooks has a warm place in my heart, and I'm hoping you might still call me Snooks now and again, but it loses its charm if it's the only name I hear. I'd love for Snooks-Pooks to be a special nickname that I hear sometimes, but it's not a replacement for my name. I'm an adult and I've changed my name. And I'd like you to call me by my name.

If you'd like to visit me this summer, you need to accept the fact that you're visiting your daughter, Ashley. And if you can't reconcile yourself to visiting Ashley, then perhaps you may need to reconsider whether you'd like to come at all.

Love,