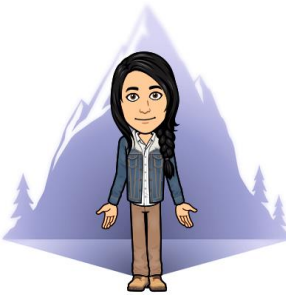


Growing Up as a Girl (1963-1980)



I arrived in this world as a healthy, biological girl on December 27, 1963. I was raised primarily in Southwest Virginia, where my father taught chemistry at the local university, and my mother raised me, my older brother, and my younger sister in a typical middle-class neighborhood. We rode bikes, played softball, swam, and played kick-the-can during the summer months, and built snow forts, rolled snowmen, and sled during the snowy winter months.

I knew at age 4 that I was different from other girls. I abhorred dolls and playing house, preferring to play Matchbox Cars and *Cowboys and Indians* with my brother and his friends. I was happiest hammering nails, digging in the dirt, throwing a ball, and riding my bike when not at school. I was extremely anxious and uncomfortable in traditional girl's clothes, yet my open-minded and nonchalant Dutch mother didn't pressure me. Instead, I wore my brother's hand-me-down pants and shirts, and chose my winter jacket from the boy's section of the Sears Catalog.

I was often told that I was pretty and looked like my mother by adults while simultaneously being derided and called a *Tomboy* by kids. Even at the age of 8, I knew that both sets of comments were accurate: I was a pretty girl who dressed like a boy and preferred traditional boy activities. But the overriding message I received as a child was that I fell short of being a girl or a boy.

By the time I entered high school, I had distinguished myself as a good student, avid cyclist, and talented young tennis player. I still dressed boyishly yet kept my long braid as the only symbol to distinguish myself as a girl. At 17 I fell in love with my best friend, and reluctantly came out to my parents as gay (the term, lesbian, never felt like the correct label for me). I would spend the next 5 years living a closeted life while attending college in Southwest Virginia.

Transitioning to the True Me (1983-1989)



I realized that I was transgendered during an unhappy and unfulfilling college relationship with another woman. The realization was very sudden. It felt like a key had unlocked a door that had been tightly sealed for 20 years. Like many trans people coming to terms with their "true" selves, I was not elated. Instead, I was terrified to have discovered an intrinsic and deeply private part of my humanity that was so grossly out-of-alignment with the natural order of things. Yet, once the cat was "out of the box" it certainly wasn't going back in.

Forty years ago, the medical protocols for sex reassignment surgery **required** three years of psychotherapy and one year of hormone replacement therapy before you could even make an appointment with a sex reassignment clinic. So, I started the arduous process of psychotherapy during my sophomore year in college (1983). In 1986 I changed my legal name and started taking male hormones. The physical transformation was gradual and my outward appearance often confused people. The psychological stress of this transition period was enormous, and I often fell into a deep depression.

I was finally admitted to the sex reassignment program at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville in 1988. After three days of assessment by a team of psychiatrists, psychologists, endocrinologists, and plastic surgeons, I was approved for "top" surgery. This was followed in 1989 by a hysterectomy that Virginia law *required* if I wanted legal status as "male." I never had phalloplasty ("bottom" surgery) - a complex, multi-stage surgical intervention with the risk of permanent nerve damage and results that I knew would never render me whole.

I graduated from Roanoke College with a degree in psychology in 1988, and eventually moved to Washington, DC in 1991 to begin my career as a membership database analyst with the American Psychological Association.

Grad School and Career (2000- 2021)



After living in Washington, DC for about 10 years, I returned to SW Virginia and completed a masters degree in corporate communication. I then worked for several years for the university's corporate and professional development institute delivering soft skills training workshops (e.g., leadership development, effective communication in the workplace, new supervisor training, team building) as an independent consultant.

From 2006 – 2014 I worked at two different universities – Virginia Tech and Michigan State University - that were building capacity for their first billion-dollar campaigns. It was an exciting time! I designed and delivered technical training on large-scale fundraising databases and reporting tools to several hundred development officers and support staff at both schools. Technical training put “bread” on my table, but once the training programs were developed, the work was repetitive.

In 2014 I became director of learning for a national trade association, where I administered member education programs (e.g., institutes, workshops, conference learning) and developed a global learning strategy to improve access to and quality of member learning. The culmination of that work resulted in the publication of the industry's first body of knowledge (core competencies) for strategic leaders and managers in the field.

I currently reside in Michigan and use my professional development skills and academic background in psychology and communication to offer life coaching. I think my trans journey gives me perspective, empathy, and deep respect for other transgender men and women on their journey.

When I am not coaching, I enjoy working on DIY projects around my house, traveling, working in the yard, reading, watching movies, and playing with my pets. One of my lifelong dreams is to build a tiny house or cabin in the mountains of Virginia or North Carolina.