

THE TESTOSTERONE MONOLOGUES:

A TRANS MAN'S MEMOIR

by

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HONORS THESIS

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## **ABSTRACT**

At one point or another in a teacher’s career, they likely will have taught a transgender student. More often than not, teachers are at a loss when it comes to accommodating students in the LGBTQIA+ community. “The Testosterone Monologues” is a creative work composed of reflections on my experience as a transgender man in preparation to become a theatre educator. This thesis is a memoir structured by excerpts from journal entries, letters, emails, and text messages written and exchanged during my time in high school and beginning of college. The chapters are organized by a series of concepts and issues that young transgender people tend to struggle with or experience, including identity discovery, coming out, chest binding, medical transitions, and relationships. By revisiting and exploring these subjects in connection to my education, I argue the importance of supporting queer youth. This thesis is directed toward a general audience but can specifically be geared toward educators who wish to accommodate their classroom and instruction for and better understand queer students.

## INTRODUCTION

“What you are about to read may come as a shock to you, so beforehand, all I ask is that you take the time to fully examine and consider my point of view on this very sensitive subject. I’m still the same person you have always known, and that will never change.

I identify as female-to-male transgender, meaning that I’m basically male with female body parts. Perhaps you have heard about people who identify the same way on the news before, because this is the same concept. Most of my friends have known for over a year, my parents have known for about a year now, and [my brother] has known for a few months. They are all very supportive of me, and I hope you can support me in this complicated journey, as well.

Before you ask, no, this is not a phase. I am male and I always have been, but it took me fifteen years to realize it. I need you to understand that this is my way of life now, and I’m so serious about this that my other extended family members will be receiving a letter similar to this one.

From now on, I’d like to be referred to as “he” instead of “she.” I understand that you will have trouble with this at first, which it may or may not take time to adjust, but please try your best effort to do so. I will not be changing my first name, so that makes it easy on you as far as calling me “Avery” goes. Please avoid using “ma’am” or “miss” with me, as that could also hurt my feelings.

I’ve been bottling this up from the world for over a year now, and I’ve finally decided that I’m ready to go out into the world like this, and I want everyone everywhere to see me as male instead of female. Please try to accept and respect this, because how you respond could make or break the relationship I have with certain family members, and if I have to break our relationship because you don’t agree with my being transgender, then trust me, it will happen for the sake of my emotional well-being, although I hope that won’t be the outcome.

I love you very, very much, and I hope we get to see each other soon.”

My mom didn’t like that last paragraph. “If I have to break our relationship... then trust me, it will happen.” She said it sounded threatening. This was before I had self-respect for myself and my identity, so I usually did what she said. I love my mom, truly. She is one of the most supportive people I have in my life. She was doing the best she could with a trans kid in 2016.

I sent out copies of this letter before she had the chance to look over them, and when she did, she told me to email each of the recipients apologizing for the way I

phrased that sentence. I guess my intention with including this “threat” in letter was related to how scared I was of how my extended family would respond; I wanted to be prepared for the worst-case scenario. No—I wasn’t scared—I was terrified. Fortunately, every response was filled with love and acceptance. One of my aunts sent me a lengthy response, and this is how she closed it:

“I am sure it is very difficult for you to open up with so many extended family members and worry about their reactions. Please know that my family will be very supportive of you. My heart hurts a bit for you too that you are having to confront such huge social issues at age 16 and again, I am extremely proud of you for opening up to so many family members. My prayer is that doing this will bring you nothing but reassurance and love.”

I’m not very close with her, but I know she loves me to the moon and back. For Christmas one year, she gave me a canvas on which a collage of libretto scraps from *Hercules*’ “I Can Go the Distance” is glued with “I am on my way, I can go the distance” painted in black across it. It’s still hanging in my apartment today. After my aunt gave it to me, my mom told me how much my aunt was looking forward to giving it to me, which made it so much more special. I used it for a show-and-tell type of activity my sophomore year of college; I came out as trans to this class... just because. It’s much easier for me to come out to random people now than five years ago. I wonder why that is. When I was 15 and 16, having people know that I am trans was my worst nightmare.

“I think I can speak for a large majority of transgender men when I say that we are not transgender men. We are just men. Unless you’re a huge internet sensation or if you write a whole book about your gender, you probably don’t want to be recognized as transgender. I don’t want to go around telling people ‘Hey, I’m a man with a vagina.’”

No, I don’t go around telling people I have a vagina. However, I can be a very trusting person; once I feel even the slightest ounce of comfort around someone new, I

will tell them that I'm trans. Is it because I like to feel special? Included? Validated? Maybe. But I certainly don't have the same ideology as I did five years ago; I'm not just a man, I'm a trans man, and I'm proud of it.

Being trans in college is no big deal. I chose what community I wanted to be around, and I have more opportunities to surround myself with people like me. Almost all my friends know that I am trans, but they don't treat me any differently than if I were cisgender. High school is an entirely different story. I grew up in a conservative town in the conservative state of Texas, where kids who are clones of their parents spout the same (often ignorant) information they've been fed their entire lives. I found safety and comfort in some friend groups, and I had several teachers who were accepting; a couple of them could have been my third and fourth parents. Some, not so much.

At the beginning of my junior and senior years of high school, I emailed each of my teachers explaining my situation to them and asking them to refer to me with he/him pronouns. All the responses I received had the same general supportive tone.

“Thank you so much for letting me know in advance. That will make a smoother start of the year for both of us. Please let me know if I or your classmates do anything throughout the year to make you uncomfortable. I want my classroom to be welcoming to everyone.”

This email was from my AP Physics teacher. I only took her class for a few weeks before I dropped down to on-level Physics, but she went out of her way to make sure my new Physics teacher was just as understanding and accommodating. Alternatively, some teachers consistently used she/her pronouns with me, and it was oftentimes difficult to tell whether it was accidental. The most frustrating part at the time was that they had never known me as a girl; I introduced myself to them as a boy. They never had the chance to use she/her pronouns with me before, but there they were still calling me a girl

in front of the entire class. It was confusing enough for me; I can't imagine what my classmates were thinking when they heard me being called a girl one class period and then a boy the next.

The greatest experience I had with teachers in high school, however, was with my theatre teachers. I never officially came out to them, but they somehow knew what was going on with me. One day, the head director pulled me to the side asking if I would like him to only cast me in male roles, and my answer was a resounding "yes". For the first time, me being trans wasn't an obstacle in my student-teacher relationships; it was a way to strengthen them. I can vividly remember having this conversation (now six years ago) in the black box, my director telling me he already knows who he wants to cast me as in the one act play. Between that and my ongoing friendship with the assistant director, I knew I had a home in the theatre program.

There were times in high school where I felt unsafe, like when my history teacher's son called me an "it", when people stared at me no matter which bathroom I went into, when I found out someone was uncomfortable with me changing in the boys' dressing room; but there were so many times and places where I felt safe and protected by my teachers. As an aspiring teacher, it is my first priority to make my classroom as accommodating, safe, and comfortable as possible for each and every one of my students. In terms of equity, I know some of my students will need an extra boost in confidence; students of color, students with disabilities, students with mental illnesses, students who are queer. Although I will aim to be accommodating for all my students, there are some I will feel obligated to help more. My theatre teachers went out of their way to ensure I was comfortable in their classes, and it made a world of a difference.

My sophomore year of high school was the first time I ever experience true, unmanageable stress. I was competing in UIL for theatre, competing in SkillsUSA for audio/video production, and performing in a community theatre production. Those obligations coped with my advanced classes caused me to experience stress at all hours of the day. I was also getting into the technicalities of my gender transition, so my hormones were all over the map. The one incident that put me over the edge was when one of my peers accidentally knocked over my water bottle. I lashed out on everyone in the room, exclaiming that I will not be the one to clean up the spill. People replied saying “it’s not a big deal, it’s just a little water”, but in that moment—to me—it was a tremendous deal. I broke down crying in the dressing room in the middle of rehearsal later that day. One of my directors found some time to come talk to me, reassuring me that everything is going to be okay. He knew the stress that I was under.

I was one of those kids that relied on the reassurance and approval of others, especially my teachers. My anxiety prevented me from talking to my teachers when I was struggling, which sounds like a bad excuse, but my heart rate would exponentially accelerate anytime I tried to talk to a teacher before or after school. As a teacher candidate, I have learned that grade school and high school teachers should be reaching out to their students to assess their needs and be part of their learning journey. As a high school student, I only experienced this with my theatre teachers. My core curriculum teachers did this to an extent, but eventually I felt like they gave up on me. I watched my peers in Pre-AP Biology and AP English excel and prosper, while I had to spend extra money on audio books in order to understand anything going on in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

The standards and expectations for teachers are constantly evolving as we make more discoveries and gain more empathy for students. High school students—in particular—are expected to participate in extracurricular activities, do community service, and have a part-time job, all the while maintaining good grades. I was one of those high school students who did a million different things (as previously mentioned), and I'm still not quite sure if I did it all for me or to satisfy those who held power over me. Regardless, teenagers are going through physical and emotional changes and essentially discovering who they are and their place in the world. High school was the turning point for me and my identity, and it was sometimes difficult to focus on being a studious, well-rounded, hard-working person when I didn't even know who I was. Two of the people who made me feel the most comfortable, accepted, and unconditionally loved were my theatre teachers. They couldn't care less what gender I identified as; they saw my assets as a student and helped me grow as a theatre artist.

I like to say the main reason I have decided to become a teacher is because I am eternally grateful for what my theatre teachers have done for me, and I want to carry on the tradition and do the same for future students. This still reigns true and is the core of my teaching philosophy. Somewhere out there is a trans kid in middle school who is hopelessly lost in darkness, but when they reach high school, I will hold the torch and help guide them through the journey of finding their place in the world. Helping that one kid graduate high school and find happiness in themselves will have made everything I am doing today to become a teacher worth it.

## HOW DID I KNOW?

“I researched and researched for months, going back and forth trying to convince myself that I was transgender and that I wasn’t transgender.”



**Figure 1.** 27 October 2014

September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014. I don’t know why I remember the date, but it is etched in my brain from now until forever. I would stay up late watching old episodes of *Degrassi*, the episodes from the 80’s. They’re all on YouTube. CTV created a new series called *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, which started airing in 2001. A character who appeared in season 10 (2010) caught my eye on that September evening; he was a boy, but something about him gave me an intense feeling of euphoria. His name was Adam.

Adam Torres was the first and only trans man to appear in the *Degrassi* legacy. When I found out that he was, in fact, trans, I didn’t know what this meant. After doing some research, something clicked. I never felt more emotionally attached to or identified more with a television character. Too bad he died in a texting and driving accident.

*Degrassi* was just step one. Step two consisted of an immense amount of research, taking arbitrary quizzes on All The Tests, and downloading apps that helped me connect with other trans youth. I spent the entirety of my freshman year of high school in an endless internal debate. “What if I am a boy?”; “I don’t want to be a burden to my

family”; “What if my boyfriend breaks up with me?”; “Adam makes it look so easy”; “My friends will think I’m seeking attention”; “I really think this is who I am.” By the end of my freshman year, I had cut my hair, bought a ton of new shirts, and started using they/them pronouns around my friends.



**Figure 2.** 31 July 2015

The summer months of 2015 are by far the most embarrassing part of my transition. I saw one Instagram post that talked about the identity “tendogender”, which basically meant “questioning”, but you’ll never hear this term anywhere anymore. I unlocked this memory my junior year of college and all my queer friends thought I was making it up. I identified as “tendogender” for a few months, then started to learn toward “demi-boy.” No matter how far I tilted that scale toward the masculine end of the spectrum, it never felt masculine enough. I had to be a boy. There was no grey area. I knew there were feminine aspects to my personality, and I accepted that, but having even a slightly feminine gender identity was out of the question. Somewhere in the middle of my sophomore year of high school, I brought down the hammer; I am a boy.



**Figure 3.** 18 October 2015

How did I know? That is an excellent question. How do *you* know you are who you are? When you're cisgender—meaning you identify with the sex you were assigned at birth—you don't really have any second thought about your gender. For some trans people, you can tell very early on in childhood that something is off. For others, you don't make that realization until you have one foot in the grave. It's different for everyone. I knew because I always felt more euphoric and part of the group around other boys when I was younger; I was more comfortable in masculine clothing; being called a “girl” just felt so... embarrassing. Not because I thought girls were any lesser than boys, but because I had so little in common with the other girls in elementary and middle school that I always felt out of place and being included in the addressment of “girls”, “daughters”, and “ladies” made me cringe.

As I stated before, there is no one way to know whether you are trans. I feel like it tends to be a gut feeling triggered by a random source, like a song, a person on the street, or a piece of clothing. For me, it was a character on a Canadian teenage soap opera.

## COMING OUT

My mom had bought some clothes for my younger brother and me to try on before we began our 7<sup>th</sup> grade and sophomore years. I was doing it to make her happy; I wasn't sure if she would be able to return the clothes, so I put on a smile and walked down the runway that was the hallway into the living room. It grew more and more difficult to act compliant as I tried on more blouses and jeans that shaped my hips so femininely. "What's wrong?" I'm usually able to maintain my dignity until someone touches me or actually acknowledges that something is, in fact, wrong. I broke down crying in front of my parents. I wanted to run away into my room and completely avoid the subject but being defiant to my parents' face was never something I had the courage to do. I do as I'm told and sit on the couch, not allowed to leave the room until I fess up. They sat in their two La-Z-Boy recliners—the judges' chairs—while I felt the invisible chains pressing me into the couch.

They (the people of the world) say you should get to come out on your own terms. I was not mentally prepared for this conversation, but it certainly wasn't the first time I tried to come out to my parents. I was very close to doing so earlier that summer; I was going to leave them a letter before departing for a week-long theatre conference, so I could give them some time to react and think without me having to be in the room. I had the letter printed out and everything. But I chickened out at the last minute. That was my chance to execute my ideal coming out story, but instead I was bawling my eyes out on the couch and playing a game of 20 questions.

"Do you like girls?"

"No."

A lie, but not really the point of the conversation.

“Do you think you are a boy?”

I nod and hide my face in my knees. This was it. The beginning of getting disowned by my parents and living on the street.

I don't know why I was so hard on my parents before I came out to them. They never necessarily did anything to make me think they might disown me, but they also never said anything to make me believe they would be supportive. I had heard and read the countless stories of transgender teenagers being kicked out of their homes, or—even worse, in my opinion—continuing to live in their homes but being manipulated and mentally and physically abused by their parents. Remember Leelah Alcorn? She was a trans woman in high school who came out to her parents when she was 14. Her parents proceeded to not accept her identity, refuse to support a medical transition, forced her into conversion therapy, and stripped her of her access to social media. In 2014, her suicide at the age of 17 attracted international attention. She was all I could think of any time I considered coming out to my parents. I could be the next Leelah.

The remainder of this conversation with my parents is a blur, but ultimately, they decided I was going to see a therapist and hopefully work everything out, whatever that meant for me. I also remember them saying some of the clothes I was trying on could be unisex and don't have to make me feel dysphoric; I tried explaining to them that wearing a women's shirt—girly design or not—would make me dysphoric. *Knowing* that I was wearing a women's shirt would drive me to the edge. If other people looked closely enough, they could see it was a women's shirt just based on which side of the shirt the buttons were on. They went into their bedroom, and I went into the playhouse in our

backyard to call my friend and tell her that everything was fine, but that I was terrified of what could happen next.



**Figure 4.** 16 January 2016

It took about a year for the rest of my coming out process to complete, but how it would play out was pretty much decided for me. My parents wanted me to come out to my grandparents in person, which was understandable. I came out to my mom's mom in her car; a lot of queer people like to come out in cars because the driver/passenger can't do anything to hurt you, and they're trapped in the car, so they have to listen. I wasn't expecting my grandma to do anything to hurt me even in the slightest, please know this. She is now one of the most supportive people I have in my life. Then I came out to my dad's parents in my parents' living room. My grandpa stood up and I thought he was about to leave the room and never speak to me again, but instead he came over and hugged me. I told my grandparents I chose my middle name because it was the middle name they gave my dad, but I also found out that day that it was also my grandpa's middle name. Funny.

My grandfather turned out to be much more supportive of me than my grandmother (on my dad's side). They moved to Texas from North Carolina when my dad was seven, so you can imagine the ideologies they brought from over there. This past Thanksgiving, I visited my grandparents with my dad; this was the first time I had seen my grandfather since I started growing out my facial hair, and when he saw it, he touched it and said with a smile, "it's cute!", which in turn put a smile on my face. On the car ride there, my dad said, "this might be the first time we've been to their house since that one awful Christmas." That one awful Christmas, indeed. I had been out to my grandparents for a couple years at the time—my grandfather, even as a Trump supporter, still very supportive—and my grandmother still wrapping her head around it. When it came time to see what was in our stockings, I reached into mine and pulled out women's body wash and lotion and a set of pink socks (my grandfather didn't really participate in stuffing the stockings). My dad immediately began to fume; I could practically see the steam from his blood boiling. He stood up and professed his anger, standing up for me in front of my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. I wasn't sure if I felt more embarrassed to be the center of attention in front of all my straight, cis cousins or proud to hear my dad display his (very passionate) support. That was the last Christmas my grandmother ever dared to put anything feminine in my stocking.

After coming out to my grandparents, the next step was to write and send letters out to my aunts, uncles, and godparents (once again, my parents' idea, but I could respect it). And finally, I was allowed to come out on Facebook to the rest of the world.

"For the past year or so, my immediate family and most of my friends have known that I identify as transgender. For those of you who don't know, this means I have a female body, but I feel mentally male... I guess to put it simply, I'm a boy who didn't turn out just right.

As challenging as this all is, I really hope all of you can come to accept me. My friends and immediate family have been trying their best to refer to me as “he” as much as possible, and it is most appreciated. I’d like everyone to start referring to me as “he”, but I do know this will be difficult for some people more than others.

This transition is very important to me, and there’s no turning back. As most of you know, I’m a huge theatre geek. My directors have been contributing to this by referring to me as “he” and casting me in male roles, and it feels amazing to play my true gender both on stage and off.

Coming out to the entire world is probably the most difficult thing I’ll ever have to do in my life, and all these baby steps have led up to this. Thank you for reading, and hopefully understanding and accepting me.”

I received 43 comments—all positive—several supportive direct messages, and a series of direct messages from one person telling me to find God. My favorite responses were those from parents from my community theatre explaining their kids’ reactions.

“I told [my daughter] about your announcement and preference in pronouns, and she shrugged and said “okay!” No questions, no judgement, just happy to know how best to address you! Hope everyone can make the adjustment with ease!”

“My boy said, ‘Duh Mommy, I already knew that!’ He also moved on very quickly by telling me that he wanted you to know that he got a classic GameCube game. He made me send a picture too!”

“We told [our daughter] at dinner tonight. She said “Cool. These green beans are really good.” So sorry that you’re as cool as green beans.”

At the time, these kids were all no older than 10 years old. I was always really great with the younger kids at my community theatre, so naturally I made connections with many of the parents. I’m very fortunate that they and their children were all accepting; that made it very easy to keep going to my community theatre and know that I will feel safe and loved.

From the very beginning, all I wanted to do was come out on Facebook to everyone at once and get it over with. I don’t have any resentment toward my parents for having me do it differently, though; I think it went much better this way, actually.

However, I think this should be a conversation between parent and child about what to do rather than the parent instructing the child what to do, especially if the parent has never had to do something like that before.

My Facebook post was the biggest part of coming out, but the process of coming out never really stops. You run into people with probing questions; you date people and eventually have to tell them; you show the ID you've been procrastinating getting changed to a new employer and they ask why it says you're female; you get comfortable enough around a group of friends and confide in them. People act as if it is just one big gesture and you never have to worry about it again, but the reality is there is no end to coming out. But—by coming out to your friends, employers, and partners—you find out who really deserves to have you in their life.

## BATHROOMS

“From that moment on, I restricted myself to either using the handicap or having [friends] back me up in the women’s restroom. Since then, I have been accused of being in the wrong restroom several times and eventually decided to announce my sex to everyone in the restroom when I entered. I still hate doing this and have used very few women’s or men’s restrooms. I tend to look for a handicap.”

For five consecutive summers, I attended a youth theatre conference with my community theatre. I like to think of each conference as a checkpoint in my transition...

- 2014: still identified as female
- 2015: questioning my gender
- 2016: started using he/him pronouns and playing male roles
- 2017: began hormone therapy
- 2018: I’m a MAN!

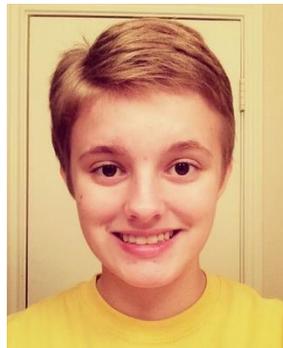
I felt like people would see me as a different person every year that I went. In 2015, people didn’t really know who I was at all. Bathrooms felt like an alternate universe for me; it didn’t matter whether I was a man or woman as I sat in workshops or performed on stage. But, as soon as I even thought about using the bathroom, my bloodstream filled with anxiety because I had to make a choice that would affect the rest of my time at the conference. I hadn’t used the men’s bathroom before, and I hadn’t reached that step mentally, so I either had to use the women’s or handicap bathroom. I decided to use the women’s restroom, first.

I was wearing a t-shirt and cheap Walmart cargo shorts. A woman walked in behind me, hesitated, turned around to look at the sign next to the bathroom door, and continued in cautiously. She stared at me through the mirror as we washed our hands.

This interaction didn't bother me enough to retreat to the handicap bathroom, because later that day...

“I used the same restroom, and once again while I was washing my hands, a few girls stared at me through the mirror and giggled amongst themselves. Minutes later, I was walking to my table where my group was eating lunch, and as I passed the same girls' table, their group pointed and laughed at me. I was humiliated.”

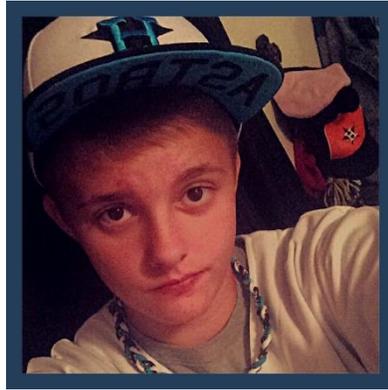
For the remainder of the conference, I used the handicap bathroom. This was an entirely different kind of uncomfortable because what kind of physically able 15-year-old kid would need to use the handicap? I stressed the entire time I was in there, imagining some sad, old lady in a wheelchair patiently waiting her turn. “Sorry! I'm a gender enigma and don't want to be picked on by 12-year-old girls!” I could have been much less fortunate, however; transgender people are physically abused and traumatized in bathrooms constantly, and my fear was being the subject of gossip.



**Figure 5.** 18 June 2015

Later that summer, I went to a baseball game with my family. Blue jeans, t-shirt, a jersey that was too big for me, baseball cap, tennis shoes, and a weird necklace I bought at a carnival and was somehow supposed to give me balance (it matched the color scheme of my outfit). Despite the photo to follow being ridiculously cringey, I decided to include it here because it's from that day. At one point during the game, I followed my

mom into the women's bathroom, and as I was washing my hands, a woman approached me saying "sweetie, I think you're in the wrong bathroom". I told her I wasn't, but the thing was... I was in the wrong bathroom.



**Figure 6.** 2 August 2015

I quickly became aware that there was not going to be a handicap or unisex bathroom in every building I would ever go into. I would literally shout out "I'm a girl!" anytime I had to use the women's bathroom; it was cringey, but at the time I felt it necessary. I made women and girls uncomfortable when I go into the women's room, and I was too small and weak to go into the men's room. This is when I decided to take the big step of asking a friend for help with my transition from women's to men's room...

"You know how I told you that one time that I don't wanna be a girl and all that junk? Well, I've been researching bathroom laws and stuff and if people are allowed to use the opposite bathroom as their sex but the same or the relatively same as their gender. If I find something to prove that I would be allowed in men's restrooms at school, then I think I'm gonna try going in there more often, but I can't go alone. Not to make it awkward or anything, but I'd need you to go in there with me as back up or whatever, because you never know if someone is going to start yelling at me or beat me up. I'd really appreciate it if you'd help me out with all this."

He was one of the closest friends I had in high school. His family were regular church goers, and they still treated me with kindness and respect throughout my

transition. He agreed to help me, although I'm not sure how often I actually ended up asking for his help. He was mostly emotional support in the men's dressing room during rehearsals. It was still a brilliant gesture, though.

Eventually, I was able to regularly use the men's restroom without a buddy. Today, I walk into the men's room without a second thought. But when I was younger and didn't "pass" as a man, knowing someone I trusted would go in with me was exceptionally reassuring. I was part of my high school's Gay Straight Alliance for about three years, and one of the activities we would do every year is create pins with various messages; the rainbow pins said, "talk to me!", and the trans flag pins said, "I'll go with you!", as in into the restroom. This was a great idea conceived by previous club officers and the sponsor of the club. The sponsor was an English teacher who is one of the kindest teachers I have ever interacted with; I was never in her class, but because she was so open about LGBTQIA+ rights, I knew she was a safe person to go to if I ever needed to. She is absolutely one of the teachers I am grateful to have had in my life. She is one of the teachers who I aspire to be even half as great as.

I am fortunate to never have been physically assaulted in a bathroom. I am more masculine-passing today than I was in high school, and I walk with more confidence; walking into a restroom as a teenager was often nerve-wracking, no matter which one I chose to use. I developed a legitimate fear of using public restrooms for a while. My teachers played a big role—although they may not have realized it—in helping me ease my way into using men's bathrooms. They wanted me to feel comfortable and safe. My theatre teachers went out of their way to make sure the men's dressing room was a safe space for me. The Gay Straight Alliance sponsor—an English teacher who I barely

knew—made it one of her priorities to protect trans kids. I am forever grateful for their kindness and ongoing work to make the world safer for queer students.

## BINDING

Ironically, bathrooms sometimes served as a safe haven for me, a kind of escape. I was usually in Biology class—around 9:30am—when I began to struggle to breathe. I felt poking and prodding on my ribs, like my chest was about to collapse. I grabbed the big, obnoxious bathroom pass, rushed down the hallway, locked myself in a stall, and took off my shirt. And then my second shirt. And then my undershirt. Revealing the four ace bandages wrapped tightly around my chest, so tightly that the hooks that came attached to them snapped off from all the strain I put on them; the illusion of a flat chest was being held together with a handful of safety pins. Underneath all the bandages was a sports bra. Underneath the sports bra were two sacks of fat I constantly thought about slicing open and emptying myself. I sat there in the bathroom for a couple minutes, then slowly reassembled my ensemble, sucking in every last ounce of boob. I returned to class, anticipating when I will need another break.

This was a chore I did every day beginning the second semester of my freshman year of high school. I usually rode my bike to school, so I would let my chest hang loose until I arrived at school and went straight into the dressing room to begin the torture process. I knew it was unsafe; but at the time, it very much outweighed the possibility of someone seeing a bump on my chest. I am a huge advocate for binding safely and, you know, breathing. But I was afraid to get an obscure package delivered to my parents' doorstep and have to come up with some elaborate lie (I was a horrible liar, so saying it was a birthday present for a friend was out of the question). It seemed so much easier to ride my bike to Walmart, buy a couple elastic bandages, and call it a day. Why spend \$40 to ship a fancy undershirt when the Walmart Pharmacy is just around the corner?

It started off with just two...

“Mom cleaned out everything in my room that I had left on the floor, which included my binding supplies. I cried and cried and went to Walmart to buy another two rolls. Once I received all my stuff back, I was so dysphoric that I started using all four of the bandage rolls. I have to go to the bathroom two or three times a day to readjust because my chest is screaming in pain.”

Several months later, I decided I should just give in and sacrifice the \$40. I had a friend at the time who was my main supporter, and she helped me get my first binder. I ordered a white tank binder from GC2B and had it delivered to her house; she then gave it to me the next time we saw each other. As soon as I got home that evening, I locked myself in the bathroom and put it on. When they're new, binders are *really* tight. You don't think you'll be able to get it off. But that was not a concern for me; once I had it on, I would have been fine with leaving it on for eternity. My chest was constricted, but I never felt freer.



**Figure 7.** 13 March 2016

Throughout the following four years, I bought three more binders; a black tank, a tan tank, and a tan half binder (meaning it went about as low as a sports bra). The black one was my favorite; I wore it almost every day. The white one began to fray, so after a while I used it only for swimming. I wore the tan tank when I had to wash my black one,

and I lent it to a theatre friend my senior year when she played Dracula in a school production. I didn't like the tank half binder all that much; I liked having something tucked into my shirt to hide my belly a little.



**Figure 8.** 27 July 2018

I was so attached to my binders and having a flat chest around others that some days, I would wear my binder for 12 hours straight (you're not supposed to wear one for over 8 hours). I remember when my community theatre would have lock-ins after a full day at school, I wouldn't take off my binder for over 24 hours. When I got to college, I would wear my tan half binder to the rec center. All these things a big no-no. But I did them anyway because I thought I was stronger, that I should be able to withstand any amount of time and any activity while wearing a binder. The lengths that some trans people will go to maintain a masculine appearance is shocking.

After I got top surgery, I donated three of my binders to other students in the LGBTQIA+ student org I was a part of. One of my friends has my black binder; I love seeing them wear it and seeing how happy it makes them. I didn't donate my white binder; nobody would want that frayed mess. Besides, it was my first binder. I ought to keep at least one memento of my chest compression days.

## TESTOSTERONE

“In the patient’s daily life, their mental health issue has had a profound impact on the patient across many settings. The patient has a marked incongruence between their expressed gender and their primary sex characteristics. The client exhibits a strong yearning to be rid of their primary sex characteristics because of the marked incongruence. They exhibit a desire to be identified as male and treated as such. They also possess a strong conviction that they have the typical feelings and reactions of the male gender.”

My goal was to begin testosterone (hormone replacement therapy) at least a year before I started college. My parents and I began our search for a prescription by visiting my pediatrician, who directed us to urology. A urologist then directed us to endocrinology, who told us they would not prescribe me hormones at their office. This all began the fall semester of my junior year of high school, and I didn’t end up seeing an endocrinologist who would prescribe me testosterone until the spring—and she was over two hours away. Although I did achieve my goal of receiving the prescription at least a year before college, the process was extremely tedious and frustrating.

The first time I introduced to my parents the possibility of starting testosterone was one morning while my mom was driving me to school. I noticed she had two books sitting out in the living room, one about having a transgender child and one about hormone treatment. The mere fact that my mom was trying to educate herself made me comfortable enough to ask her about this life-altering step. I was probably somewhere in my sophomore year of high school, and I think she was startled at first that I had brought it up; she probably thought I was too young or too early into my social transition to think about a medical transition. Her counterclaim that I most vividly remember was “what if you change your mind and want to have kids?” Heh. Guess she hadn’t read the books yet. Even before I began identifying as a man, I knew I wanted to adopt rather than carry a

child in my body for nine months and push it out (it was mainly a movie shown in my Geography class that made having biological children a hard no). However, even if I did change my mind at some point—whether that be about being trans or wanting to adopt children—an AFAB (assigned female at birth) person can stop testosterone at any point and have a healthy pregnancy. The only irreversible effects I would have to worry about are voice deepening and any change in body shape or facial structure, but even now I’m still a little curvy and sometimes get called “ma’am” over the phone.

Although I had to travel a couple hours away every few months to visit my endocrinologist, I was able to have my testosterone mailed to me and have a nurse at my pediatrician’s office help me with the first injection. I had seen numerous YouTube videos of trans men injecting it into their thigh, so I assumed it would be the same case for me. Instead, she said I had to inject it into my glutes, and I didn’t trust myself to stick a two-inch needle in my butt without something going wrong; so, my mom did it for me the first year and a half. I received my first injection in the middle of a school day and returned to school to work on editing a short film, but I kept leaving my computer to go to the restroom and check for signs of facial hair. My mind was playing a lot of tricks on me, making me think I was gaining muscle and hair within the first hour.

After starting hormones, I never had another period, which was the best thing in the world. AMAB (assigned male at birth) people don’t understand the pain AFAB people endure when it comes to menstruation, and cisgender women don’t understand the pain trans men endure when it comes to being a man who bleeds every month. The last period I ever had came while I was volunteering at an animal shelter, and of course I was wearing a light shade of blue jeans. I wrapped toilet paper around the lining of my

underwear and then continued to play with cats whilst feeling like a chainsaw was slowly slicing my pelvis open. I remember thinking, “I better start hormones before this Aunt Flow bitch creeps up on me again.” I never prepared for my periods, perhaps because I thought they just wouldn’t happen if I didn’t plan for them to. I never put pads or pain killers in my backpack; I always ended up wrapping my underwear with toilet paper, toughing out the cramps, and never learning from my mistakes. Fortunately, I haven’t had to face this dilemma in nearly five years.

My voice was notably deeper within a few months. It’s still not too deep now, but compared to my girly flute voice, I was a whole new man. This was the part of going on testosterone that I was most excited for; I started testosterone a few weeks before the end of my junior year, so when I returned for my senior year, I wowed my peers with my new voice. It was like the first day of middle school when everyone looks and sounds different from elementary school, except I was a very late bloomer. I liked the attention, though. I was also finally beginning to be validated and taken seriously as a trans man. Now that I was injecting juice into my body on a bi-weekly basis, people knew I was serious about this whole “transgender” thing.

It took me three tries to pass my driver’s test. I didn’t even take them until I was seventeen. I failed my first test because I accidentally ran over a curb while pulling out of the waiting area; the proctor was in my car for about two minutes before she asked me to park, and my test was over. Crying, I texted my mom saying she could come outside and get in the car because all we could do was go home. The second time, I did a rolling stop at a stop sign (genuine mistake that I learned from), and then the proctor thought I was about to turn left at a blinking yellow arrow in front of an oncoming car, whereas really, I

was just inching closer preparing to turn after the car had passed. She commanded me to stop and had me wait until the arrow turned green. I was enraged by this situation. I was seventeen and wanted to get my driver's license, but I failed a second time for a mistake I didn't make. My dad watched as I stomped in and out of the DPS office and slammed the car door as I got back in the driver's seat. Rather than reprimand me for failing again, he praised me for being angry. He knew I had cried the first time I failed (closer to when I first started testosterone), but this time I was angry (a few months into taking testosterone); he was proud of me for exuding aggressive, masculine energy. Now, of course correlation does not equal causation (as my AP Statistics teacher said many a time), but he was connecting some dots I hadn't thought to connect before. Normalizing aggression and anger in men shouldn't be acceptable, but it made me feel a little better knowing my dad was acknowledging my becoming a man.

By the end of 2017, I was shaving about every other week (not that there was that much to shave, anyway). At the time, I had no desire to grow a beard because my facial hair grew unevenly and patchy. During my sophomore year of college, I decided to start growing it out because it was more even than a couple years before and my friends wanted to see what I looked like with a beard; but I didn't want a mustache, and I didn't want a neck beard, so I just grew out the hair along my jawline. When I went home for Thanksgiving break that year, everyone said I looked like Wolverine. I immediately shaved it. I started growing it out again as I began my junior year, but shortly had to shave it again because I was in a stage makeup class and had to test designs on my own face. After finishing this class, I was eager to grow out my facial hair once more and

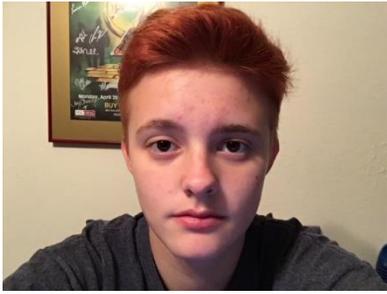
haven't shaved it all off since. I still don't like having a neck beard, so I continue to shave my neck, but I do have a mustache (it admittedly looks much better this way).

Speaking of college, when it came time for me to move out of my parents' house, I needed to learn how to administer hormones on my own. I consulted my endocrinologist about this, who said the nurse who helped with my first injection was wrong about the glutes. I could, in fact, inject the testosterone into my thigh. I sighed with relief knowing I would be able to see what I was doing without using a mirror, but I grew anxious because now I didn't have an excuse to ask a nurse or friend to do it for me. The last time I was due for a dose before moving into my dorm, my mom sat with me in the dining room and waited for me to stab my leg. My anxiety got the best of me, and I convinced my mom to do it for me one last time. This meant the next time I was due I would be doing it by myself without any hope of assistance. I sat in a chair in my dorm staring at the syringe, listening to the same song on loop, repeatedly telling myself I would do it before the song ended again. It took about 45 minutes to work up the courage, but I finally did it. Very slowly.

Since starting testosterone, my facial structure and body shape does seem to have become a bit more masculine. Even after being on testosterone for three years, people would point out recent changes, such as my grandmother (on my mom's side) saying she thought I looked bulkier around the shoulders. I figured after a few years the changes would stop, but new developments continue to pop up and I continue to have voice cracks like I'm a fourteen-year-old pubescent boy (but perhaps that's just the norm for the rest of my life). One thing a lot of people don't seem to realize is that hormone treatment isn't a one-and-done kind of medication; I could realistically be injecting myself with a two-

inch needle for the rest of my life. A reasonable stopping point might be when I'm too old to menstruate, but—when I do stop testosterone—the body and facial hair will stop, too, but I don't know how I'll feel about that when I reach that age. Thinking about becoming an old man isn't exactly on my radar right now.

When I consider the amount of money that goes into obtaining hormones, the amount of time I have spent procrastinating doing my injections, and the number of times I have actually done the injections, I wonder why some people think being transgender is a choice. Transitioning is a choice but being transgender is not. Having gender dysphoria is also not a choice, and one of the best-known ways to rid gender dysphoria (a feeling of strong discomfort from the sex one was born as) is hormone therapy. If I didn't hate almost every physically feminine aspect of my body, I would have no need to go on HRT. What would I have to gain from going on testosterone if it weren't to improve my self-image and happiness? As much as I genuinely loved having people compliment me as my voice and body changed, I was not searching attention. Hormone treatment is the cost of happiness, comfort, and belonging for most transgender people. I needed it in order to feel at home in my own body. The only thing left that would seal the deal on my desire for a more masculine body was top surgery.



**Figure 9.** Day one on testosterone



**Figure 10.** One year on testosterone



**Figure 11.** Two years on testosterone



**Figure 12.** Three years on testosterone



**Figure 13.** Four years on testosterone

## **TOP SURGERY**

From the moment that I started testosterone, I wanted to begin searching for a surgeon; that was the next big step. I would research surgeons in Texas with the highest credentials and best results, then send my research to my mom. My senior year of high school, I was so determined to get it done that I asked if I could get surgery over spring break or even winter break. At the time, my mom's reasoning for not letting me have surgery yet was because she wanted me to get my birth certificate changed, first. While I totally understand that this was something that needed to be done at one point or another, the way I saw it was that changing my birth certificate wasn't going to affect my daily life, and having an "F" on my driver's license didn't really add to my dysphoria; whereas, getting top surgery would absolutely affect my daily life and take away a large portion of my dysphoria. I don't know whether she read somewhere that trans men traditionally change their birth certificate before having top surgery and interpreted that as necessary or if she was putting off my surgery out of fear, but either way, at the time I felt like she had more control over my transition than I did.

Eventually, I convinced her that top surgery was more important to me than changing my birth certificate, and she agreed to look at my research. We were planning for my surgery to be in the summer of 2019, between my freshman and sophomore years of college. I had a couple friends who recommended Dr. Raphael from the American Institute of Plastic Surgery in Plano, Texas. They were both very happy with their results, and he had a hashtag on Instagram with posts by many more satisfied patients, so I decided to go with him. It took a few weeks and plenty of stress to secure a date because

his schedule was so jam-packed, but we got a call in April from a nurse saying a booking opened on June 18<sup>th</sup>, so we swiped it up.

After securing a date, the office sent us a laundry list of things we needed we needed to buy for both before and after surgery. For before surgery, I needed to take Vitamin C every day and wash my upper body with Betadine from neck to naval beginning a week before my surgery. I also wasn't allowed to eat or drink anything after midnight the night before, and since my operation was at 10:00am, I went about twelve hours without eating or drinking anything (including water). They even specified that when I brush my teeth the morning of, I should rinse my mouth but not swallow. For after surgery, I needed to buy maxi-pads and Vaseline (read on to find out why!), and we were provided with gauze, silicone medical tape, and medicine to help with the pain. On the day of my surgery, I was required to wear loose clothing, a shirt that buttons up, and flat shoes; so, I went with sweatpants, a flannel, and my old Sperry's that my dog chewed off the laces from and I just wore as house shoes. I also wore a binder under my flannel right up until I had to take it off to put on the hospital gown and compression socks. That was the last time I ever wore a binder.



**Figure 14.** 18 June 2019

After getting into the hospital gown, my parents and I waited in a holding room, and I laid in a hospital bed. Dr. Raphael came in, asked me to sit up, and he drew lines all over my chest with a purple marker to ensure he'd make everything even. After he left, a nurse came in and inserted an IV into my hand, preparing to give me the anesthetic she nicknamed the "cocktail" or "the good stuff". Within a few minutes, I started to fade out. I remember saying goodbye to my parents as I was rolled down the hall, being pushed into a room with a bright light shining in my eyes, and as a man began to hover between me and the light, I passed out.

When I woke up (it felt like just minutes later), I was in another room with a new nurse. I could barely get any words out of my mouth, but I was able to faintly ask for water. The nurse handed me a small paper cup of water with a straw in it. She would set it back down after every time I took a sip, and my half-asleep self felt like a bother every time I asked her for another sip (to be fair, I hadn't drunk any water in twelve hours, and I had never felt drier or in more pain). I probably hung out in that room for about half an hour before my parents helped me into a wheelchair and pushed me out to the car. The back seat had several pillows to support me, and although the hotel we were staying at wasn't very far at all, I easily fell asleep on the way there. Upon arrival, my parents helped me inside, to our room, and into bed, and I fell asleep for a few more hours. Even after waking up again and having not eaten in about sixteen hours, I still wasn't all that hungry; but my parents were, so my dad went out and grabbed Panera. All I wanted was tomato soup, but I remember it tasting very good. Other than that, I spent the entire day laying in bed, comforted by pillows on each side of me.

"I think most of the pain is coming from the ace bandages wrapped around me. They're extremely tight because they have to be, but the nurses will remove

them tomorrow and wrap me in new ace bandages that are much looser. I'm feeling pretty upbeat now that I've had the chance to relieve some pain and I'm looking forward to seeing my scars tomorrow before they get rewrapped."



**Figure 15.** 19 June 2019

We returned to the office the next day for the reveal and my first post-operation appointment. The scars weren't too pretty, but they were much more pleasant to look at than what was there before. Seeing my chest flat for the first time ever was almost overwhelming; I had been waiting for this moment for over four years, it didn't even feel real yet. They gave me instructions for the next week, wrapped me up again, and sent me on my way home. Until my next post-op appointment, I wasn't allowed to shower or even take a bath; I had to use bath wipes, and my mom helped me wash my hair in the kitchen sink once or twice. I would continue to sleep with several pillows surrounding me, and I wasn't allowed to reach my hands up; I was told to ask others to grab anything higher than I could reach with "t-rex arms". I also had to walk around regularly and gently flap my arms. Despite feeling disgusting and walking in circles around the living room like a chicken, the worst part of my first week of recovery was this sharp pain I kept experiencing on the far end of my right incision. It felt as if an inch of the incision was coming open again and my nerves were rubbing against the wrapping.



**Figure 16.** 20 June 2019

When we returned to Plano at the end of the week, I told a nurse about the pain I was experiencing, and she suggested I buy primrose tablets. My parents decided to make this visit to the Dallas area a small summer vacation, so I was going to do anything I had to get rid of this pain. And let me tell you—the primrose worked like a miracle pill; during our vacation, we went to “Ripley’s Believe it or Not” where we participated in a couple interactive attractions, but I didn’t feel any pain at all. If I hadn’t taken the primrose, that might’ve been the most excruciating experience of my life. Our other vacation activities consisted of going to Cheesecake Factory, seeing *Les Misérables* at Bass Performance Hall, and stopping at the Cameron Park Zoo on our way home. It was a lot of activity for a person in recovery, but it was worth it.



**Figure 16.** 25 June 2019

Also during this week's post-op appointment, they unwrapped me again and gave me further directions. From then on, I had to unwrap myself, remove all the dressing, apply Vaseline to my nipples, cover them with gauze, tape maxi-pads to my incisions, re-wrap with the ace bandage, and top it off with a compression shirt from Academy. Many surgeons will use draining tubes for the incisions, but the American Institute for Plastic Surgery has used a technique for years that eliminates the need for draining tubes. I was required to do this process twice a day for the following four weeks. At the end of those four weeks, I didn't have to use maxi-pads or apply compression to my chest anymore, but I did need to change the gauze on my nipples for another couple weeks and stick the silicone medical tape across my nipples for the next few months.



**Figure 17.** 9 July 2019

Beginning week two of my recovery, I was beginning to feel better very quickly (in part due to the primrose). I went right back to volunteering with my community theatre and working at my part-time job. Later that summer, I even traveled to Pennsylvania to work at a summer camp. Now, three-and-a-half years later, my chest has healed very well, and I couldn't be happier with the results. As for my birth certificate... I still haven't gotten it changed. I've filled out the forms dozens of times, but never actually filed them. It's on the agenda, though. My grandmother recommended I get my

legal documents changed before I get my teaching certification, so it's currently in the works. Soon, it will become something that will affect my life; but for now, I'm extremely happy with the progress I've made in my transition.



**Figure 18.** 21 June 2021

## RELATIONSHIPS

The last relationship I was in before I began my transition was with the same friend I asked to accompany me into restrooms. He had already confessed that he liked me a few times, but I never officially said “yes” to a relationship with him until just before the spring break of my freshman year of high school. I genuinely did like him back, but I was very close to coming to terms with not being a girl, and I didn’t want him to get caught in the middle of that. My feelings for him got the better of me, though, and that’s when I said yes. It only took me the one week of spring break to realize I made a very inconsiderate decision, and I needed to break things off with him before things went downhill. I told him the following Monday morning when I got to school (we didn’t see each other all spring break), and he was very understanding. He turned out to be one of my best high school friends in the coming years.

The next time I had a legitimate crush wasn’t for another two years, and it was the longest crush I ever had without anything happening. We had known each other since I was thirteen and had this cool handshake that lasted about a minute. I started crushing on her around March of my junior year and spent the rest of spring and basically the entire summer with her because of theatre, but I kept procrastinating admitting this to her. I remember coming out to her as trans in the women’s dressing room; I guess you could say this was step one, so she could see me as a boy for a little while before I admitted I liked her. I had plenty of chances to do this throughout the summer; I spent a lot of time thinking about pulling her to the side while backstage and telling her, but it never happened. That September, I asked her to Homecoming with a homemade Pokémon-themed sign, and she fortunately said yes. We had a really great time at dinner and the

dance, but she ended up wanting to leave halfway through the dance because she was used to going to sleep around 10:00pm. At the time, I couldn't tell if she was genuinely tired or making up an excuse to leave out of discomfort or not enjoying herself, but looking back, she has mentioned having an early "bedtime" several times and I don't think taking it personally was reasonable. I continued to have a crush on her for a little while after that, but eventually lost that feeling after not doing anything about it for six months. She, too, is one of my best friends to this day, and we were probably better off never being an item.

A few months later, I began to have a crush on the very last person I thought I'd ever have a crush on. We had a bit of a negative history, but time seemed to heal our wounds and we were able to be around each other without steam coming out of our ears. I found out that she felt the same way, and we began dating near the end of February of my junior year. Things were honestly going amazingly the first couple months; I was buying and making her gifts for each of our monthaversaries, we went to our junior prom together, and we were texting basically anytime we weren't in the same room. But around late-May, our relationship started to lose that Honeymoon-phase feeling... at least for me, it did. I could tell she cared a lot more about our relationship than I did, and after I started testosterone in mid-May, I started to feel more comfortable with my attraction to men again—which might've just been the placebo effect—but I was losing that spark very quickly. I decided to break up with her shortly after the school year ended; I think she saw it coming, too. I was acting strangely around her for a week or two and told her I needed to talk to her about something in person, so it was just a matter of officially ending it. We didn't really maintain a friendship after that; in fact, things just got

progressively worse between us throughout our senior year. We have made amends since then, however. I'm grateful to have her in my life, but it's probably for the best that we don't collaborate in theatre all that much anymore.

Soon after getting out of that relationship, I very quickly developed a crush on a guy at the youth theatre conference I mentioned before; it was probably a rebound crush, but I was also seventeen at the time and had just begun my second puberty. When I told him about my crush, he said "I'm flattered, but I'm actually trying to get into [another guy's] pants." Classy. The classiest of rejections. Getting into other people's pants wasn't even on my radar; all I wanted was a wholesome relationship. His rejection caused me to spiral, thinking about how skinny the other guy was compared to me ("he probably thinks I'm too fat") and how he might've known I was trans (if he's trying to get into someone's pants, I'm probably of no interest to him). I spent the rest of the night beating myself up over being too physically feminine and too fat (I really wasn't fat at all, but I've been conditioned to think I'm bigger than I am), even though he said nothing to imply either of those things were evident or an issue.

The following February of my senior year, I was at SkillsUSA (a UIL competition mainly for students in career and technology classes) when I received a direct message on Instagram from a guy from my rival high school asking to talk on Snapchat, so I added him, and we began talking. I thought he was cute, so I was very flattered that he started flirting with me. I finally figured out the caveat of this unrealistic situation when he started asking for... "pictures." I told him I wasn't interested in that, and when he kept pushing, I told him I was trans. I'm not sure why I thought this would be an effective

defensive strategy, but it worked. He said he was no longer interested and immediately blocked me. That's when I began to think I would never find love.

I was proven to be wrong that April, when my theatre program was doing the public performance of our one act play competition piece. Because I was in both theatre and audio/video production—and none of the other AVP students were available to film our performance—I had to do it myself. Because I was performing in the play, I needed to hit record on the camera a few minutes before the performance actually began; I ran to the back of the auditorium to turn on the camera and begin recording, when suddenly I locked eyes with one of the audience members sitting a few rows from the front. I guess you could say it was love at first sight (at least that's what I like to say), because I couldn't take my eyes off him the entire time I was back there. I was able to stop thinking about him while I was onstage, but while I was offstage, I couldn't stop thinking about how I was going to track him down after the performance.

After our bows, the cast did our traditional run to the foyer where we shook the audience members' hands and thanked them for coming. When the guy got to me, the first thing he said was "I like your boots", which I thought was just a hollow compliment at first, but I later found out he was quoting Simon from the movie *Love Simon*—which had recently come out—from that awkward scene between him and his yard-working neighbor. The person he came to the show with (let's call them Friend A) was someone I had known for a few years from my community theatre, but I hadn't seen them in a while. After all the audience members had gone through the line, I tried to find the two of them again and speak to them, but they had already left. I thought I had just lost out on my last chance at love.

Once I got out of costume, I spoke to my friend who was playing the lead character in the show (let's call her Friend B) and told her about the guy and how I knew the person he was with; apparently, Friend A was also friends with Friend B, who had invited them to come. Friend A then invited their friend (the guy) to come with them to the show. Friend B started to freak out and made it her mission to get me and him in contact. As I was walking to my car in the parking lot, she almost hit me with her car in an attempt to stop me, saying she got the guy's Snapchat from Friend A. He and I started texting that very night. Seeing as I had a history of turning people off with my transness, I decided to tell him before I fell too hard and inevitably got rejected. Surprisingly, he didn't care; he said his friend (Friend A) had told him that I was trans while they were looking at the playbill and pointing out who they knew in the show. We texted constantly throughout the next week (possibly moving too fast with all the heart emojis) and made our relationship official eight days later.



**Figure 19.** 30 May 2018

We went to prom together, spent most of the summer together, and ended up spending eight months of our relationship long-distance because he was a year younger than me and I was moving to college. We made it through, though, and he followed me to Texas State the next fall. Another year passed, and we moved into an apartment together

with two other roommates. Now, we live alone in an apartment with my dog, and I couldn't be happier.



**Figure 20.** 4 August 2021

My experience with relationships is a complicated one, because there are still plenty of people who are unwilling to date a trans person. No trans person is going to force anyone to date them (at least no reasonable trans person), but I'm on the train that refusing to date trans people because they are trans is, in fact, transphobic. If someone didn't want to date me because I was trans, obviously I wouldn't want to date them either, so it's not a huge issue to me. But in the past year or so, there has been a rise in a fake sexuality called the "super-straight" community, which was started by straight people who are blatantly and openly transphobic and would allegedly never date a trans person. I can confidently say no trans person would want to date someone who proclaims themselves to be "super-straight", but the fact that this fake community was even conceived is terrifying. To think that some people are so hardcore transphobic that they needed to create a new sexuality is repulsive. Nobody like that is currently in my bubble or anyone I currently associate with, but they're out there... mainly hiding behind their anonymous TikTok profiles. I'm blessed to be in a healthy, nearly three-year relationship, but many trans people aren't so fortunate.

## CONCLUSION

When I was just starting my transition, I idealized myself as a man who someday nobody would have to know was trans; I didn't *want* people to know I was trans. I wanted to be seen as any other man who happens to be bisexual. Nowadays, as long as I feel safe around a person, I don't really care whether they know I'm trans. When I'm at work, I'll casually tell a story that implies I'm trans, realize the person I'm speaking to probably doesn't know, and then say, "oh yeah, by the way, I'm trans if you didn't know already". Even by choosing to write my thesis about being trans, I'm outing myself to anyone who chooses to read it. I'm outing all my experiences, the story I've kept to myself for seven years about becoming the person I am today.

I also understand that by telling all these stories, some of the people I mentioned might be taken aback by what I say about them or may even be offended. How I see it is every story I have told in this thesis is crucial to my transition, my story, my life. Only sharing the good would bring about no change and would essentially defeat the purpose of my thesis. I care about every single person I have mentioned in this thesis, and I love all the friends and family members I mentioned. Just as I have made mistakes, so have the people in my life, but my love is unconditional for the people who continue to support me, whether they supported me from the beginning or not.

I have one semester left as an undergraduate student, and that semester will be spent in public school classrooms 40+ hours a week. This project has given me the opportunity to look back on what I was going through at any given stage in my life and how the people around me influenced my mental well-being. As I go into student teaching, I need to keep in mind all the obstacles that prevented me from being the best

student I could be and not hold current students to the same standards I set for myself, because they were usually unrealistically high, and I rarely managed to reach them. Education is extremely important, I wouldn't be going into this field if I didn't think that was true; but I know that students have lives, they have struggles, and they're in the process of figuring out who they are—right in the middle of a pandemic, nevertheless. As a teacher, it is not my job to place any unnecessary pressure on them; it is my job to support them on this journey of self-discovery and prepare them as best I can for life outside school.

For transgender students, this means using the name and pronouns they ask you to use for them. It means addressing when other students and faculty say or do things that are harmful to transgender students. It means providing opportunities for students to learn about experiences and cultural backgrounds different from their own. It means incorporating literature and media that hold up mirrors to diverse students and windows to privileged students. It means validating all experiences and opinions while providing objective education on sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression. It means intentionally ensuring your classroom is a safe space for all students. If I could go back six years to my freshman year in high school, this is what I would want to get out of every class, and it is what I got out of some classes, notably theatre. With theatre, there is an infinite number of stories you can tell, which makes it the most beautiful thing when you have a diverse group of students. I've told my story; now it's time for me to help them tell theirs.