

*written &
photographed by*
SUSAN KUKLIN

BEYOND MAGENTA

TRANSGENDER

teens

SPEAK

out

**BEYOND
MAGENTA**

A NOTE TO THE READER

The stories you are about to read are of real people, members of the transgender community, whom I have come to appreciate and respect. An author is supposed to be objective, and this author has withheld judgment while conducting interviews, taking photographs, and writing. But my subjects' willingness to brave bullying and condemnation in order to reveal their individual selves makes it impossible to be nothing less than awestruck.

As part of their transition, most of the participants have changed their birth names. Whenever I refer to them, I use their chosen name and PGPs—preferred gender pronouns—before, during, and after their transition. My comments are represented in a different typeface.

Since each chapter is different, like a series of short stories, you can read them as I placed them or in whatever order you want.

Susan Kuklin

SPECTRUM



JESSY

The House of My Soul

When Jessy got his period, he was confused. He says, "It was, like, 'Oh-my-good-ness!' I cried to my mom: 'Why, why, why? Why am I a woman? I don't want this. I don't want to give birth to a child. I want kids, but I don't want to be the one giving birth. I don't need menstruation. Mom, I don't want this.'

"You think I want it?" she said. 'Every woman deals with it. It's what makes you a woman.'

"And I was, like, 'Oh, God! Here we go.'"

I was never a person who said, "I hate my body." I just wanted it to fit more with what I felt inside. I ate right and treated my body with care because it's the house of my soul. I've always loved my body, and now I love it even more because it fits how I feel.

I've never been gay-bashed. No one has ever said really hurtful things to me. I've never experienced much disrespect from my peers. I think that's because I have a positive attitude. I've always been happy and bubbly, and I've never made people feel uncomfortable about who I am. My Facebook page says "male—so happy I'm taking T," so I'm out there. ("T" stands for *testosterone*, a male hormone.)

All in all, I had a fun childhood. I did a lot. I took music lessons — piano and guitar. I was in honors band, and I also played the saxophone. Everyone has bad times, sad times, and I have too, but mostly I'm the funny, loud, happy person in the room. I'm the one making jokes, playing pranks. Ask my advisor. Ask my friends.

My real name is Kamolchanok. It's a long name. I'm Thai. I'm from Bangkok. When I moved to the U.S. with my parents, they said, "No one's ever going to say your name properly, so let's just call you Jessica." I was okay with that when I was little.

I was always a tomboy, always the girl who played with boys. After a while, people said, "We're going to call you Jess. Jessy." I still use my real name on legal documents, but everybody knows me as Jessy.

I'm an only child, an only daughter. My parents call me their son now.

In the beginning . . .

All the Girls Wore Dresses

When I was three or four, my parents moved us to the U.S. because of my dad's career. He's a diplomat. We lived in Cooper City, Florida, until I was about thirteen.

As a three-year-old, I had a lot of boy friends and we were always playing with toy guns. One day I went into the boys' bathroom with them, and my mom pulled me out. "You can't go into that bathroom." I was heartbroken.

"Why can't I go into that bathroom?"

"You're a girl — you have to act like one. You can't always be with the boys." From that early age, I knew that being a girl is not me — that is not how I feel.

I have preschool pictures of me wearing a suit and a necktie. It was at a Valentine's Day party at school, and you had to dress nice. All the girls at school wore dresses. I said, "Dad, I don't want to wear a dress. Can you pick out a suit and a necktie for me?" And my dad bought a boy's suit and a clip-on necktie. I was about six. I loved wearing suits and neckties. It felt right to me. But usually I wore dresses and stuff.

In first or second grade, I had a little crush on a girl. I remember thinking, *Oh, she's so pretty.* I wanted to pull her hair, to bother her. *Should I be feeling this way?* I wondered if the other girls felt this way.

When I was eight, I started taking karate and boxing. I remember how much I liked punching the heck out of the boys; I never wanted to fight little girls. It felt weird. I knew I was better than the girls, and I wanted more of a challenge. One time, even though we wore foam masks, I got a cut on my face. My dad saw it. "Oh, I don't like to see you get punched," he said, and made me stop.

Instead, my mom forced me to take dancing. "Try it! If you don't like it, we'll change." She wanted me to try Thai dancing, but because of playing basketball and soccer at a really young age, my hands were not flexible. I had no flexibility in my body. I couldn't even bend over to touch the tip of my toes.

She made me do a little tap, jazz dancing, and ballet. I cried every time I had to go. "Nooooo!" I would hold on to the bar and literally cry my eyes out. "I don't want to wear spandex! *No!*" I just cried. When it came time for the recital, she begged me, "Please, just do it. I promise I will never make you do it again. Just do the recital." I did it. I felt like crap! I wore a sexy little red dress and bows in my hair, and I had to pose. I just wanted to cry. "Why are you making me do this?" I was so mad.

After that I started playing little-league soccer and was the star player. Everybody said, "Your daughter's amazing." All the coaches wanted me on their team.

Soccer and basketball were my main games because my dad loves those sports. He would teach me how to kick, how to shoot. He bought me a big hoop, and I would play with all the boys.

Puberty's Reality

Once Jessy started puberty, reality came crashing down. There was one thing he did not want.

Breasts! I was starting to develop breasts. Oh, crap. I hated bras, never liked wearing them. I had always been a sports-bra person.

It wasn't just looks. It's the way people treated girls. I can hold my own door, thank you. I can protect myself.

When Jessy turned twelve, his family returned to Thailand. He learned to read and write Thai fluently at an international school that used an American curriculum. The textbooks were from America, and the teachers were mostly teaching in English. This helped him feel comfortable as a Thai and as an American. But yet something was wrong, and he couldn't put his finger on it.

In Thailand, they call people like me “tomboy,” which is basically a butch lesbian. I guess people had questions about me. I was questioning me too. I wasn't sure what I was, so I tried to make people think I was straight. I tried to be a big girly-girl, just to fit in. No matter how pretty I looked, I felt uncomfortable. I felt like I wasn't right in a physical sense.

I went on a date or two with boys from my school—my mom even met them—but it was never an intimate relationship. It was, like, “I really like you as a friend, you're an awesome guy, and I want to hang out with you, but I don't want to go beyond that level.” It felt so uncomfortable.

I had a problem with the clique of girls I was in. They were the prettiest girls in school, the conceited clique.

“We're the prettiest! We're the most popular,” Jessy says, using a singsong voice, raising his eyebrows, and shaking his head from side to side in amused disgust.

They tried to push me. “You should wear this. You should wear that!” It wasn't me.

When I was with them, I'd say, “Oh, I think he's so cute!” But what I really thought was, *Oh my God, what am I saying? I think she's so cute!*

I had long hair and was trying hard to act like a girl. When I told them I wanted to cut my hair, they wanted to know why.

“Wait, you're not my mom,” I said. “Why are you asking me this?”

At one point, they asked, “Are you gay?” I said I didn't know, and they started saying things that were kind of mean. No, not kind of—it was mean.

“I can’t believe you are that kind of person,” my close friend said, glaring at me like I was from another planet.

“Why would you do that?”

“Tell me if you are!”

I said, “You say you’re my friend. Why can’t you accept me for who I am? How can you say those things to me?”

How could I call these people my closest friends when they didn’t even know who I was? That’s not the definition of friend. A friend is someone you can share things with. You can be yourself around. If you had a crush on someone, you can tell your friend. I could not do that with those girls.

Finally, I said good-bye to that clique, and I ate lunch alone. I was hurt. I was kind of lonely. But I was not going to finish high school there, anyway—I was going to the States, so whatever . . .

During that time I thought, *Am I really a lesbian?* I was scared and unsure about myself. Before I came out, I had to make sure that this was what I wanted for myself. That this was who I wanted to be.

By ninth grade, I really got into sports. I played basketball at the time, on the girls’ varsity team. I tried to dress pretty, but I felt so out of place in a skirt. Every time I looked in the mirror, I felt I shouldn’t be wearing it. I’m *not* ladylike. That’s not me.

Now, when I show people a picture of me as a girl, no one believes me. In the picture, I was wearing lipstick and a dress. Everyone says, “That’s your sister.”

“No, I swear to God it’s me.”

During Jessy’s early high-school years, he didn’t know what the word transgender meant. He was only questioning his sexual orientation. He thought, Hey, if you like women and you’re a woman, then you’re a lesbian. He didn’t know about gender diversity because he was young.



When Jessy was known as Jessica

On the one hand, he wanted to please his family and be accepted by society. On the other hand, he knew something was not right.

At first I thought maybe there is something psychologically wrong with me because I was thinking this way, because I was feeling this way. Am I abnormal? I was a little insecure. I didn't have anyone to talk to. I had to work through it on my own.

I asked myself, *Well, what's wrong with liking the same sex? Is it sinful? Why does society view it as something so bad, so taboo?* Love is love, and whoever you feel you love, express it, it's okay. It's not like I'm a crook or a robber or doing harmful things to people. I'm just trying to be who I am. I'm just trying to give the love that I have to someone who happens to be the same sex as me. I didn't see anything wrong with that. I started questioning a lot of things about society—especially social roles.

Time passes. . . .

Coming Out, Part One

Tenth grade was when a lot of drama happened in my life. I was, like, *enough!* No more! I was tired of trying to make other people happy around me. *I was tired!* I could be so much more if I could just be myself.

I started to hang out with a group of girls who were open lesbians. I cut my hair to my earlobes and spiked it up. Spiky. I got into my new look. I started dating girls and I started to become the real me. And that's the year when my relationship with my mom got a little rocky.

When I first came out to my mom as a lesbian, she withdrew. She had to step back, like, *Whoa.* A lot of this was happening because of puberty. I wanted to go out; I wanted to do this and that. I was exploring myself. Those were my watershed years, years when every kid, straight or not, rebels and thinks their parents don't know anything. Everything they said was outdated. Coming out made things even more complicated.

The thing was, although I dated lesbians, I was attracted to straight women. I was attracted to girls who like men. The girl I started dating was straight. Her sister was a lesbian, but she herself was straight. I guess she

was going through what I would call an experimental phase. I had classes with her every day, so we saw each other all the time. We became close, and things easily elevated. But if she had just seen me on the street or something, I don't think she would have liked me.

I wore retro-looking suits with slim neckties or bow ties. I was almost like a metrosexual man; I liked getting my nails done. A metrosexual is a guy who has certain female qualities. He likes being pampered. Hair. Nails. He dresses sophisticated. He's always on point with his style. The shoes have to match the shirt. That's something girls do. But metrosexual men are into that as well.

Back in the Closet

After finishing tenth grade in Thailand, Jessy moved back to Florida. His parents wanted him to go to college in the States and thought it would be easier to get in if he went to high school here too. Since his parents were living in Thailand, Jessy stayed with an uncle. Although Miami is a liberal area, Jessy went to a strict, Christian, coed high school.

My life became harder. I didn't want people talking about me. I didn't want them on my back. I had heard that there were a few lesbians at the school who had posted pictures of themselves and their partners on Facebook or MySpace. Some school administrator found out, printed the pictures, and showed them to the principal. They were almost suspended. That basically shoved me back into the closet.

I grew my hair out and looked more feminine. I didn't tell anybody that I was attracted to women. I said to myself that I'm here to get good grades and finish high school. I don't need to share my sexual identity with people. I made a lot of close friends, but they didn't know about me.

At the school, everybody loved Jessy. He was smart and funny and very popular. He was a terrific basketball player. But there was always a wall. That's because Jessy was living a lie. He told no one, not even his closest friends, who he really was.

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High-school graduation

When I was sixteen, I saw a TV episode about the transgender community, and the first thing that came into my head was “*Oh, my god! That could definitely be me!*”

I was starting to come to terms with my sexual orientation. I wanted to be the masculine figure in a relationship with a woman, to be seen as a straight man attracted to women.

I wanted to transition, but before I did, my mother had to be the first to know because we have always been so close. I knew that I could not go into transition without her knowing about it. I would never do that. Still, I kept these thoughts to myself, never saying anything till the summer before my last year in high school.

Coming Out. Part Two

Back in Florida, I started dating a girl I met on a social networking site. We had a relationship, but it didn’t last that long—it was more like a fling. But because of her, it became important for me to tell my friends that I was in a relationship with a girl. Before starting college, I wanted to make it clear to my friends in high school that I date girls; I wasn’t attracted to men. I called myself a butch lesbian.

On the day I graduated, I came out to my friends. I said, “There’s something I have to tell you guys. I’m dating a girl.”

They said, “Yeah, we kind a figured that because you’re not the most feminine person. We sensed it, but we didn’t want to ask you. We respected your privacy. We didn’t want to make you feel uncomfortable. But we feel bad that you couldn’t tell us because you’re our friend, and we love you no matter what.” It was a good way to leave high school.

It was also a good way to start college, knowing that my friends in high school accepted me as I am. When I went back to see them spring break of freshman year, it was so different because by then I was a hundred percent me. It was beautiful.

Coming Out Trans—to Mom

By this time, Jessy's parents had moved to Nairobi because his dad had become the minister counselor for the Thai embassy in Kenya. Jessy, who wants to become a doctor, spent the summer with them while participating in a medical internship.

I said, “Mom, I’ve been reading a lot about the transgender community. I’ve been reading a lot about taking testosterone. I think that’s what I will be doing once I start my sophomore year in college. At the end of summer, I’m going to find a place where I can begin transitioning.” I said it to her just that way.

I could tell she was a little bit disappointed, not disappointed but drawn back. Actually, she was kind of shocked, shaking her head, like, Why would you do this? “Why would you want to?” she asked. “Why can’t you be comfortable with yourself? I don’t see other lesbians doing this.”

I explained that I never felt like a lesbian. I never wanted to look feminine. I’m attracted to the whole feminine look, but I never wanted it for myself. I love long hair. I love dresses. But I never wanted that on me; I wanted that on another person, the person that I was attracted to. “Besides, just because someone else doesn’t do it doesn’t mean I can’t do it.”

I told my mom that I wanted people to see me as a man in a heterosexual relationship. I wanted to be referred to as *he*. I wanted to live my life as the man of the house, masculine. I know there are butch lesbians, and all that stuff, but I didn’t want to be that. I just wanted to be a normal man.

She took it in. She cried about it. She cried in front of me about it. Honestly, it made me feel awful. It made me feel I was doing something horribly wrong. I felt like a screw-up. But I’m not a screw-up. I told myself that sooner or later she was going to come to terms with this. I told myself that as with everything in life, things happen for a reason.

Once she cried, I took a step back. For a while, I said nothing more about it. After all, I had to understand where she was coming from. I had to give her time to come to terms with me. As a new parent in the delivery room, when the doctor says you have a girl, you expect to have a daughter. You expect your child is going to be what society has paved for her. So I realized that I had to give her time.

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Two or three weeks later, I talked to my mom again. I told her, “I want to transition. I’m at a point where I’m responsible enough to carry on my transition.”

She said, “I don’t know. I can’t accept this yet. You’re my daughter, and I want you to be the way you are. I’m happy with you being a lesbian; don’t transition. Don’t physically change yourself.”

We got into a heated argument about it. “Mom, I do everything to make you proud. I’m the child who never disappoints you. This is the only time I’m asking you to understand something about me. I know it’s hard. I don’t expect you to completely understand me, but please try.” I said this over and over and over until she finally accepted it. That truly showed her unconditional love.

Open communication is beautiful. Now she’s completely fine with having a son. She even put me down as her son on Facebook. Recently, she told me, “You know, I think you’re going to be a very handsome man.”

It’s a process. It’s a gradual process.

My mom’s my best friend and I talk to her about everything. It’s always been that way, but now it’s even stronger because she’s proven to me that she accepts me for who I am, not what I am.

I said to her, “Mom, I was always the kid who wanted the highest grade in class. I was the girl who beat the boys in basketball. I tried to be the best in everything, just ’cause I wanted people to see beyond my exterior look. I want people to see my accomplishments and say, ‘Wow.’”

My mom said, “I want you to blow the world away with your transition as a man. Start working out. Go to the gym. Look good. And you can’t be a fat man. No girl likes that.”

I love my mom. Without her support I probably wouldn’t be as open about my experience transitioning.

To Dad

I don’t think my mother told my dad about me wanting to transition. He knew I was butch lesbian and that I was dating girls because I was bringing

girls to the house back in Thailand. But he didn't know about me wanting to transition.

A very close family friend has a nephew who was a trans woman, and my dad told me about her. I said, "Well what if I go through that one day?"

"I don't want much from you. I just want you to be happy and successful. I want you to be happy who you are. I want to see you become a good person, someone with values and someone with morals. That's all I expect of you. I don't care what else you do. And I want you to take care of us when we're older."

My dad has always been a very busy man, so I've not spent as much time with him as I would have wanted. He was always traveling, always on the go. My mom raised me. My dad was the disciplinarian. He's a strict and stern man. He'll say something once, and if you don't get it, you're going to be disciplined.

He's also very intelligent. He loves reading. He loves to study. He loves to build things. Everything I've learned as a man comes from my father. Be strong. Don't cry. Don't whine.

My mom is more nurturing. She's the softer side of me. She's the one who made me a hopeless romantic. She taught me how to make something look aesthetic and beautiful. She showed me that it's okay to be emotional, to be sweet, to be caring, to be gentle.

She taught me how to cook because every girl wants a guy who can cook. She taught me how to clean so that there's not a speck of dust in the house. That's my mom. She's a very caring, sweet, loving person.

Almost up-to-date . . .

LGBTQ

I'm a college student now. Saint Joseph's College is a private school with a Catholic name. I'm on a full scholarship, and I try to be a leader in school activities. I work for the campus activities board. It's a very honorable position, and I like the jobs that I do. I ran for vice president of the school. I'm on the school newspaper. I know everybody at the school, and everybody knows me.

Years ago there used to be an LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer) group, but it died out. As the only transgender student, I brought a new kind of diversity to the school. I became the president of the new LGBTQ.

The president of the college said that what I was doing was great, and that the whole school supported me.

Transitioning

Jessy went online to research transgender forums. The Callen-Lorde Community Health Center, in Manhattan, has a program called HOTT, Health Outreach to Teens, which helps transgender teenagers transition. Jessy went to the clinic, ready to take the necessary steps to transition to male.

Not so fast. Before Jessy could begin the physical process of transitioning, he had to go through sixteen sessions of therapy. Sixteen? That would mean waiting four months. He wanted the hormone shots now. Not now, yesterday!

The therapist, Nicole Davis, explained that before he transitioned, he had to be sure that this was what he wanted to do. It's a matter of discovery, of self-exploration. As a trans male, Jessy will need hormone shots, testosterone, for the rest of his life. That's a big step.

Nicole was amazing! I love her! I was very comfortable with her from the start. I'm so glad I had those sixteen sessions with her. It gave me the time to make sure transition was what I wanted, and to make sure I was ready to deal with certain obstacles that come with transition. Like, when to start using the men's bathroom, how to switch pronouns, and how to interact with my family and friends as a different sex.

Nicole provided the information so that I could formulate my own decision. She never said, "Oh, you can do it." She would listen to what I had to say, and ask, "What do you really want to do? Is that how you feel?" She helped me come to my own decisions. She gave me space to think through things on my own, which really helped, because I was going through such a confusing time. Basically I needed someone to shut up and listen to me. And Nicole did that very well.

I had periods of doubt. At one point, I thought maybe I shouldn't take the hormones. Maybe I should just stay like this. I love being healthy and was scared about possible risks.

At night, before I'd fall asleep, I would lie awake in the dark, under the covers, tossing and turning, thinking. In the daytime, I'd daydream. I was afraid that there would be technical difficulties.

How would I be seen in the workplace? On official papers I'd be identified as female. In person I'd appear male. How would an employer react?

There were sporadic moments when I said to myself, "All right, I'm ready! I'm completely ready!" Then, spontaneously, I'd go, "Oh, my God, wait!"

I want to be a doctor for the transgender community. I want to be able to say to someone, "I'll do your surgery for free." For someone like me, feeling good about the way you look is so important. It adds to your self-esteem. It defines how you function in everyday life. If you look in the mirror every day and say, "I don't want to look like this," you won't have the will, the drive, to be anything in life.

I would take one step forward, then one step back. I was like a little kid about to jump in the water. My toes were in the water and I'm about to jump in, but then I'd pull my toes out 'cause it would be too cold.

I also didn't want the dependence of taking hormones every two weeks to stop me from doing other things in life. I love to travel, and I see myself working in third-world countries. What if I got a job somewhere but I couldn't go because I had to be in a place where I could get hormones. What would I do?

Jessy talked about these concerns with Nicole. She helped him understand that there's always a way around things if you want it badly enough. People would hire Jessy because of his skills, not because of his gender. Bottom line: Was Jessy ready to change? Midway through the therapy sessions, he decided that he was ready.

Then he thought of yet another obstacle.

Jessy is a Thai citizen, using a Thai passport. He's in the States on a student visa. In Thailand, you cannot change your legal gender.

He worried what would happen when he went through customs looking male with a passport that said he was female. Jessy gave this as a reason not to take the hormones. It was just too risky.

Nicole told him that taking hormones was his choice, and his choice alone, but that he would be able to change his passport picture, and the clinic could write a letter explaining that he's transitioning, so he wouldn't have a hard time passing through customs.

Finally, after thinking and talking and weighing his options, Jessy said to Nicole, "You know what? I'm ready! I want to transition. This is me! The world will have to just deal with it."

In March 2011, I started taking testosterone injections. After being on them one month, my metabolism was crazy. I started noticing more underarm hair, and my muscle mass was increasing a little. People noticed the changes. Even Nicole said I looked a little bit different.

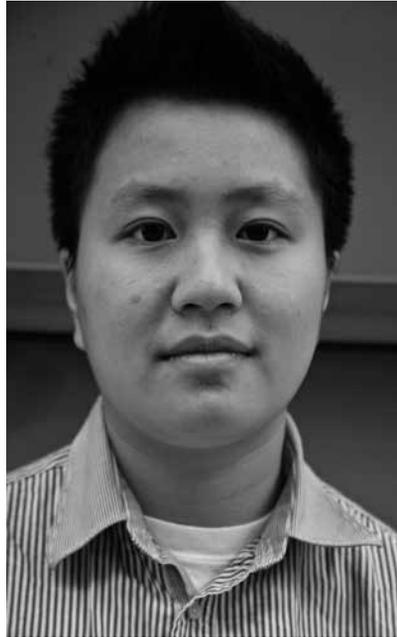
I ate constantly. All I thought about was food. I ate two bowls of spaghetti when before I only ate one. And on top of that, I found myself eating two scoops of ice cream. I overdosed on tortilla chips and salsa. At night, I could have sworn I'd eaten an hour ago, but I would be hungry, like I hadn't eaten for four hours. Food. Food. Food. I just wanted to eat! Most of my budget went to my stomach.

My sleeping habits changed too. I wanted to sleep more. That's how it is for biological men too. They sleep longer than women.

Maybe because I'm young, my body took in the hormones very fast. I got the shots every two weeks. For the first two shots, I had a half dose. That's the protocol. After the first two shots, you can decide if you want to keep to that amount or increase it to a full dose. How fast you want to transition is your personal choice.

At first I thought I would not rush it. I would just do low doses of T and change slowly. But then, once I started to feel the changes and I started to see myself looking how I really, truly wanted to look, I got so excited. I wanted the full dose.

In the beginning, I told my friends that I was transitioning and they were, like, "Okay, what does that mean?"



TRANSITIONING

Left: Photograph
taken April 6

Right: Photograph
taken April 18

Below: Photograph
taken May 5



“It doesn’t mean anything,” I said, “but it would be more appropriate to call me *he*, instead of *she*, because it would match what I identify myself as and what I look like from the outside.”

They were completely cool and honest when they told me, “Okay, you’re our friend, and we respect you. But you’re going to have to give us time. We’ve always called you *she*, and now you want us to switch in a night. That can’t happen so fast.”

I saw that they tried; they really did try. Sometimes they’d slip, call me *she*, and go, “Oh, *oh*, oh, oh,” and get right back to *he* and *him*.

Girls started talking to me differently. “Hey, you’re looking more like a guy every day,” they told me. My best friend, who’s female, said that she couldn’t wait to hear me with a deeper voice. Me too.

Most of my guy friends were happy I’m taking T. We worked out together. We had a brotherly bond. The frat guys wanted me to pledge. We went on guy nights where we talked about girl problems. It was very natural to talk about girls. The friends that I had, the community that I made at school, were very open.

Women’s Lockers, Men’s Bathroom

I was still going to the women’s lockers. Then I thought, *Wait! I’m getting further and further into my therapy, and sooner or later, I’m going to sound like, and completely look like, a man. So how do I handle the gym?* I was close with the gym owner, so I planned to tell him, “If you start seeing me going to the men’s locker room, it’s because I’ve transitioned to male.”

I won’t use the shower, though, since the bottom part of me hasn’t changed. In general I hate using public showers. I prefer to shower at home.

Ever since I started transitioning, I’ve used a stall in the men’s room. When you see me you say, “That’s a male.” It would be awkward if I used a women’s bathroom. A lot of men are pee shy; they use the stalls, not the urinals. Women are different. When women go in the bathroom, they look around, talk, they put on makeup. But men just go in, do their business, and leave. They’re not looking to chat or get friendly, so they don’t really care whether you use a urinal or not. I think men are less complicated.

Prince Charming

Back in Thailand, I had some friends and family who knew about my transition. They called me “Prince Charming.” They sent me Facebook messages, like, “Prince Charming, how are you? You look handsome.” I had that support ‘cause my mom proudly told people about me.

I recently went back and the neighbors said, “You don’t look close to being a female anymore.”

“Yeah.” What can I say?

“You look really good, though.”

“Thank you.”

At the end of Jessy’s sophomore year, he returned to Thailand to do a biomedical internship at the Chulabhorn Research Institute, in Bangkok. Before he left New York, a nurse taught him how to self-inject the hormones so that he could be independent.

For a split second I thought, *Oh, my God, I’m giving myself a shot.* I had a two-second adrenaline rush. I wasn’t scared, but I was anxious and had a kinda jittery feeling.

Now I inject myself in the thigh every two weeks. My thigh gets really sore, but the shot itself doesn’t hurt. It’s just a little tiny pinch. But it makes my thigh so sore, I feel like I’ve run five miles on the treadmill. The first time I did it, I couldn’t move my leg when I went to bed. Ouch. Ouch. Now it’s, like, I’m running, jumping, skipping.

Three months later . . .

I pass one hundred percent as male now. Everything about me is very masculine: my voice, my facial hair; even my skin texture is thicker, rougher. I’m a lot more muscular. I was never able to do pull-ups; I had poor upper body strength. Now pull-ups are so easy. I have a lot more stamina, endurance. I lift things now and don’t get tired. So there’s definitely been a change.

Luckily, the women in my family don’t have large breasts, so I assumed that I wouldn’t, either. And now the testosterone in my body reduces the fat in my breasts.



Photograph taken September 16

Beyond Magenta

Susan Kuklin

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