

My Quiltbag

By Shade Peters



Shade Peters, born Shelby Ruthoford, grew up the first ten years of his life in the small town of Grafton, Ohio. From ages 5-8, he experienced various traumas ranging from slight abandonment to narrowly avoiding being a victim of sex trafficking. He was adopted by his biological grandparents shortly before his biological mother's death in 2006. After moving to Florida at the age of 11, Shade discovered his true gender identity, and identifies himself as a person who is transgender. This form of self-actualization has cost Shade the safety and comfort that many 'cisgender' people (people who identify with their assigned at birth sex) enjoy. Since coming out to his parents, Shade has been put through religious and secular counseling, under the assumption that he needed to be 'fixed', and that his gender identity stemmed from the trauma he faced as a child. Shade has benefited from the counseling, but not in the way his parents expected- his Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was discovered in the course of therapy, which he now is learning to cope with in addition to the oppression and discrimination he feels as a person who is transgender



I've been who I am, in many ways, my whole life. I may have not liked what I like now, or talk like I talk now, but I've always known one core fact- that I am a boy. Since I was little, people always have told me to 'act more lady-like', and this confused me. Even though I didn't have a word for it, I knew that somehow, I wasn't like the girls I hung around with. They wanted to wear dresses and pretty shoes, and I wanted to wear my overalls and ask my mom to buy me running shoes. Sometimes I believe this gender nonconforming behavior spurred on the attacks I suffered as a child- though my fellow survivors

discourage this line of thinking. I would like to give a warning now, that the material below may be triggering to people sensitive to the needs of the LGBT community, and fellow survivors of sexual assault. Please read ahead with caution.

When I was about four or five, my mother got in with the wrong crowd. She had been addicted to prescription pain medication for a little while now, because my step father had refused to work or help her at all. From the stress and physical demands raising two young children (my brother was two at the time) in addition to working overtime as a geriatric nurse, it wasn't surprising that she turned to medications. But the people that my mother ended up running with were a different breed of addicts- they sold and bought not only prescription pain medication, but also federally banned drugs, such as marijuana. These people latched onto a band notorious for violent behavior and drug affiliation, known as Insane Clown Posse, or ICP. This is around the time my abuse began.

My mother would continue working, even if she was high, and left her friends in charge of me. My memories from this time are blurry at best, because my mind chose to repress the details to protect me. All I know is that I was repeatedly sexually assaulted by the men my mother chose to leave me with, and I vaguely remember those getting drugs out of what happened. I do remember, however, one day when one of the men duct-taped my hands and feet and mouth, and proceeded to walk out of the door. I thank God to this day that my mother happened to walk inside at that exact moment and saved me from whatever plans he had for me. This was the memory I latched onto to pull out some of the oppressed memories.

Shortly after this incident, my mother let me live with my grandma and grandpa, both who loved me very much, but encouraged gender-typical behavior. I no longer could wear my overalls and running shoes, but there I was safe, and I didn't mind as much. I fought dresses with a passion, though my grandma claims I begged for them. Then, a year after my mother was finally clean of her drug addiction, tragedy struck, and she passed away. My remaining family moved to Florida to re-start our lives.

The first year living in Florida, I met the girl I am now dating. She's beautiful and perfect in my eyes, and I knew that from the moment I met her. Of course, my grandparents were not happy at all about that, and promptly sent me to a counselor at our church. Open to help for other issues, I consented to go. It didn't last long, and I quickly discovered that his words simply made me uncomfortable. Around this time, I had begun buying a few of my own clothes, and found myself gravitation towards the boys' section. I bought a hat, a jacket, and some boxers (which greatly angered my grandma when she discovered them.). After some time, I left the counselor at my church, and began telling my friends I might prefer to be a boy. They, thankfully, were very supportive, and one even aided me in picking out my name- Shade.

When I came out to my parents, they laughed at me and sent me to a secular counselor, who 'unofficially' diagnosed me with Gender-Identity Disorder, now known as Gender Disphoria. Since a person under 18 cannot be actually diagnosed with GID, there was nothing he could do. However, in the course of helping me deal with my unsupportive parents, my PTSD was made apparent, and that was something he could actually help me with.

Up until this point, I had been convinced that I was alone in feeling the way I do, but in actuality, there are many other people in the world that identify the way I do. In fact, it was so common in many Native American cultures that they had a name for the people who identified in a way different to their assigned sex. Statistically, 1 in every 10,000 people are openly transgender.

Support for me comes in small waves- I always have the support of my girlfriend, who I have been dating for five years now, and from my transgender sister, Eric. I try very hard to be supportive of the other LGBT students at Edison, of who there are many. I have been given the privilege to use the staff restroom- the only gender neutral restroom on the high school campus- and I am not the only one who has been given this privilege, from the conversations I have heard. I have been using the internet to advocate for transgender rights, and have been bringing attention to our needs in school and other public spaces by educating people who don't yet understand. I also try to be supportive to survivors of sexual assault, and have offered my home as a safe space if anyone needs to run away. My goal is to one day become a lawyer, so I can fight in the courts for the rights of my brothers, sisters, and non-binary siblings. I may have struggles now, but through these troubles I will be made better.