

The Dilemma of Having Your Face Tortured

By Gina Maya

Introduction

I came out as a male-to-female transsexual this year, meaning I identify less with the gender I was born and raised with, and more with its opposite. It's a transition of many processes—administrative, cosmetic, hormonal, and social, to name a few—and it will take years; in some respects, a lifetime. Although I keep a weekly diary on my website (www.ginamaya.co.uk) on the ups and downs, I'll try to use these newsletters to shed light on the more general processes involving my transition. I'll start with the thing I want to get out of the way—the thing I've hated most: facial-hair removal.

It takes fifteen minutes and sometimes less. You rest in a dentist's chair, wearing dark goggles while a smiling young woman lasers your facial hair. For the first few months, there's only a 12-hour rash. Your jaw and mouth are blotchy, initially. With balm smothered over it, it looks like you're melting.

You walk back from the clinic along busy Princess Street, looking down. Avoiding eye-contact because more than ever you look terrible, a swollen, red, rash-covered face that's melting. You're walking so fast your calves are hurting.

You continue to go to the clinic every six weeks. The pain gets worse with each visit; your feet press against each other and you hug yourself during the cosmetician's polite conversation as she lasers your face. You've started taking taxis home, wrapping your face in a scarf like the Invisible

Man. Soon enough you come out as a transgender woman.

Soon enough, you're noticed in the street, you clearly don't pass as well you thought. Your five o'clock shadow becomes your obsession, not the breasts or the groin, those things you can cover. It's your five o'clock shadow, that's what will decide the social reaction. You shave at least once a day. You touch up your layers of foundation constantly, in disabled toilets that become a second home to you.

October 2016. Ten months have gone by, the dark bristle almost gone. The NHS calls you, they'll do it for free. But they need to know what they're dealing with, so there's one condition: come in with four days of facial hair growth on a bare, unmade face. We're sorry, was that a 'yes'?

Meet the Volunteers: Carol Dow; Community Ally

In August I attended the Stonewall Scotland training day for allies which was fantastic (and funded by the University). I wasn't really sure what to expect but it was very empowering and uplifting; the trainers were lovely people with enthusiasm and commitment to their jobs. The day focused on how we, as allies, can support and encourage others to help promote an inclusive and supportive environment for everyone in the workplace. We did a little bit of roleplay which (after I overcame my initial shyness) was a lot of fun. One of the tasks we were set was to give a short presentation to the group of how our weekend went without referencing place, who we were with, or their gender; this was an example of how

difficult it can be for LGBT persons being quizzed about their social life while unable to speak openly. The difficulty was eye-opening!

At the end of the day we all had to stand and make one commitment. I committed to wearing Stonewall's Rainbow Laces for my Great Scottish Run 10K, for which I was raising money for PoTS UK – a charity that supports people with the condition Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome. Rainbow Laces are part of Stonewall's campaign to stamp out homophobia in sport; wearing them on my run combined and advertised two very different, but equally important, challenges.

On October 2nd I ran in the Great Scottish Run 10K in Glasgow, finishing in 1 hour 12 minutes. I've been training for this run for 5 months after a 28 year gap from running. It was an amazing experience and I raised over £1000 for PoTS UK. My youngest son has this condition. It has been life changing for him during what should be his introduction to independent adult life and it's very hard to watch him have to come to terms with it.

Running 10K is nothing compared to the days he sometimes has.

We were 7 women (!) at the Allies training and we decided to stay in touch, and perhaps have some joint events across our respective places of work. I look forward to helping organise these. As someone with a sister who is a lesbian and a transitioning niece, I am well aware of the enormous difficulties my family have encountered and I'm enthusiastic to help support inclusion and acceptance at work. I am very proud to be part of this Staff Pride Network and to have run in my laces. They will be staying in my trainers.

SPN will be launching an allies' membership to include all colleagues who agree with the network's aims. More information is available at <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/our-work/campaigns/rainbow-laces>.

Meet the Committee: Sarah Moffat; Bi Rep

As Bi Rep on the Staff Pride Network Committee I was very pleased to be asked to contribute a piece to this newsletter to mark Bi Visibility Day, which took place in September.

Growing up, I was grateful for bisexual erasure – for the way it protected me from the most vicious and violent forms of queerphobia, for the way it saved me from having to have painfully awkward conversations with my family about subjects which are deeply personal – but, as I’ve grown older, my desire for visibility and acknowledgement have become almost overwhelming. Particularly following my engagement to my partner Callum two years ago, I’ve found the repeated erasure of what is a significant part of my identity immensely frustrating and in response have begun to advocate increasingly loudly for the bisexual+ community.

Ultimately—while visibility isn’t for everyone and some would rather their private lives be just that—when Anna Paquin is still being asked on national television if she is now a “non-practising bisexual” after marrying her partner Stephen Moyer, and when members of the media are suggesting (not so subtly) that Amber Heard’s bisexuality might be to blame for Johnny Depp abusing her, I’m going to keep claiming my place in LGBTQ+ spaces. I will keep reminding people I’m not in a “straight relationship” and I will keep looking out for all members of my queer family.