

# 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](http://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'?

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## **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>.*

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# 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.

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# Remembering Trans Remembrance

By Gina Maya

At a certain point, the playwright and actress had everybody in the palm of her hand. Jo Clifford, the evening's guest speaker, also a sort of benign cobra before us, mesmerizing, with her tales of directing theatre in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, of a life story of love, loss and artistic resurrection. She spoke of religion and the two versions of the myth of Adam and Eve, a familiar one of polarity, then another of androgyny. Somehow it was possible to be anything in that relaxed, reflective audience, atheist or religious, middle-class culture vulture or revolutionary. The event was trans remembrance, but it could have been simply about humanity.

We celebrated, then, and remembered. Avery Laquerriere read their brilliant poem about pride and alienation and shit-strewn hypocrisy. Jo Clifford spoke of her life and her career; she could have continued all night, one suspects, on any topic. We watched a movie, *Tangerine*, that became increasingly about fragile individuals falling between the cracks of social labels, trans women, married husbands, their families, prostitutes left outside bolted brothel doors. It was Christmas in the sun-swept urban sprawl of Los Angeles, with a big final scene of conflict in the plastic hollowness of a Donut Time restaurant.

Outside the room we broke for tea and pastries, while by candlelight stood a board with some eighty names of trans people, murdered in hate crimes this year, from all over the world. We celebrated trans identity, and remembered.

*And bless us*

*For all the times we have been frozen in terror*

*Let's remember we are not alone*

*Don't let us,*

*Don't let us ever forget,*

*For he is she*

*And she is he*

*And we are they*

*And they are we*

*And ever shall be*

*For ever*

*And for ever*

*And for ever*

**Jo Clifford**

*The Gospel According to Jesus Queen of Heaven*

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## **Why I do Queer Tango**

*by Maria Boutchkova*

If you don't need convincing to try Queer tango, please come along on Wednesdays either for a lunch or an evening class (12 noon – 1pm and/or 1-2pm; 7-8pm and/or 8-9pm) at Epworth Halls, Methodist Church, Nicholson Square (5 minutes from the University of Edinburgh George Square campus), otherwise, read

on for why I do it.

Over the last three years, I have been dancing on and off at the Blues and Balboa events organized by <http://www.edinbop.co.uk/>. I like the crowd there, along with the spirit of the dancing because being able to lead or follow regardless of one's presented gender is common and accepted. Before moving to Edinburgh, I had chosen to practice flamenco in Montreal for two important reasons: first, because this dance has very little partner dynamic and second, for its emotional intensity. This intensity, in my mind, can be found in tango as well, and it has been an unfulfilled dream of mine to be able to learn it one day. But the very rigid traditional roles of leading and following, not to mention the strict ritual of eye contact and nods across the dance floor before inviting someone to dance, have placed it in the "I don't do this" category for me.

Until I saw an ad for Queer tango this summer, and attended several classes in July with the amazing, inspiring, igniting Louise.

One of the rules I live by as a parent and as a human being, is to act in a way and use a type of language that challenges oppressive stereotypes. For example, I

avoid saying to little girls how cute or pretty they are, and instead I ask them what their favourite story is, or ask to see something they recently drew or made. Imagine how I felt, when Louise told us in the very first Queer tango class that we would invent our own language and instead of saying lead and follow, that we would use the words suggest and interpret.

To me Louise's will to start this class and use a new language is not only an act of activism that is in line with my beliefs but also has been a precious gift – to be able to enter the world of this magical dance that used to be inaccessible to me. I can't wait to share this gift with as many people as

possible, and I know Louise feels the same.

Here is my favourite description on how Louise teaches tango:

“Louise’s philosophy of tango is that it is about awareness and connection. To tango well, you have to be able to pay attention. Some people have called tango ‘walking with attitude’, but she thinks it’s ‘walking with awareness’ – of yourself, of the other person, of everybody else in the room, of the music. In the world and in life in general, people are often looking for different ways to connect really well with other people. As human beings, we thrive with connection, and tango is a fabulous way of being connected.”

Please join us on Wednesdays at lunchtime or in the evening for one or two hours. The lunchtime classes are 12 noon – 1pm and/or 1-2pm; the evening classes are 7-8pm and/or 8-9pm. They are at Epworth Halls, Methodist Church, Nicholson Square (5 minutes from the University of Edinburgh George Square campus). Find out more at <http://www.qte.dance/> and/or join the Queer tango Edinburgh Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/285415031797624/>.