

## A Parent's Perspective: Transsexual Identity and Wholeness

Of all the things I have ever thought that one of my children would deal with in his or her life, I never envisioned the problem/issue that Brian has been struggling with since childhood. Earlier this year, Brian was able to disclose that he has suffered from gender dysphoria since he was five and that he is transsexual. This came as a complete surprise and shock to me and to his brothers and sisters. None of us had any inkling that Brian felt himself to be female and that since adolescence he was aware—sometimes clearly and sometimes dimly—that he was, in fact, a woman living in a man's body.

Brian has been married for 12 years and has two children, Harry 10 years old and Bronwen, 8. As you might imagine the last year has been a difficult and traumatic one for all of us, but especially for his wife, Kate. They separated this summer and will be divorcing by next June. They have come to very good place in their relationship. They are good friends and are cooperating extremely well and carefully in dealing with the children. This month, December, they have begun to tell the children about Brian. They do this after having consulted with the child psychiatrist and a child psychologist. They have alerted the counselor at their school. So far, the children are dealing with the situation very well. There will be many difficulties ahead, for sure, but the good partnership between their parents and the commitment of Brian and Kate to them will see them through all this.

The events of September 11, 2001 hit Brian especially hard. Although he was not involved directly and had no friend or family members involved, the attacks threw him into a depression with anxiety attacks. He began seeing first a psychiatrist and then a clinical psychologist for talk therapy. He disclosed his life-long issue to the therapist the following January and then to Kate shortly thereafter. I found out in April, as did the rest of the family. Everyone's reaction was the same: sadness for the pain that Brian had endured his entire life and sadness for the impact of all this on Kate and the children. As I began to deal with this, I asked and received permission from Brian to talk directly to his therapist which I did. The conversation with her was very helpful. First, it was important to me to understand that she did not "do gender cases." Brian was referred to her by his Employee Assistance Program and there was no cross referral to the psychiatrist who later affirmed the diagnosis. Second, she confirmed for me that Brian was not delusional, that he was dealing with reality, knew the consequences of his choices, and was proceeding in a highly responsible way.

At first I felt that Brian was moving too quickly to resolve a situation that had only recently been discovered and understood. It was recent only from my perspective. To him it had been a lifetime of acceptance, then rejection, constant attempts to live as though it were not true and hoping that in fact it was not true. Inevitably, however, it always came back to the same reality. His reaction to 9/11 was that life is short and he had to make choices about his own identity in a way that I certainly cannot fully appreciate.

Last summer Brian began the process of transition from a man to a woman. This involves hormone therapy, electrolysis, continuous talk therapy, medical supervision, and ultimately sex reassignment surgery. This last can only be approved after he lives for a year full time as a woman. Clearly the medical profession has set up standards of care to reduce the likelihood of ill advised and irreversible surgery. I anticipate that Brian will begin that full time transition in September 2003 or January 2004. He will be known as Megan Kathleen Pickett, a name he has used for himself with himself since childhood.

I have learned a great deal about gender identity disorder and gender dysphoria in the past year. It has often been disturbing and troubling but in the end Brian is making choices that seem to be the only ones he can make in order to achieve a sense of identity and wholeness that most of us take for granted.

He is well and I am in continuous contact with him. No one in the family has rejected him; that was his constant fear since he was five. Of the many people he has told so far, very few have rejected him. That says a lot about Brian and his family and friends. Kate has accepted a tenure track position at the University of York and will return with the children to her native England next summer. She and I continue in close and nurturing contact and that will continue with her return to England. Brian spends time each summer at the University of Leeds which is an hour from York and so will be spending time with the children then as well as at other times during the year. I have the greatest admiration and affection for Kate as a daughter-in-law and as the mother of my two oldest grandchildren.

If there are those you think should know this, please feel free to share this document with them. There are a number of very informative resources available if you want to learn more about gender identity disorder.

Bill Pickett  
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