

## **I Know That to Be True: Being Transgender in Prison**

Having the courage to come out as transgender takes time. Regardless of negative, arrogant, and uneducated comments, I do not allow others to dictate who I am or who I want to be. To do so would mean I was living my life for someone else and not being true to myself. I won't do that. I know what that's like, and I'll never allow that to happen to me again.

The world we live in is not a binary one. People are not black and white. We represent a spectrum of shades and colors, and personalities. Those of us incarcerated in jails and prisons are more than the numbers we are given or the crimes we have been charged with or convicted of. We are sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons, and more. We are still alive, and we matter.

Under a 2017 Ohio policy, imprisoned people can request to be seen by medical employees to get a physical examination and be interviewed/evaluated by mental health employees regarding gender dysphoria. Sadly, many people in prison with gender dysphoria are not given the proper and correct care. I know that to be true because I experienced that myself.

In August 2019, thanks to efforts by my attorney, I was diagnosed with gender dysphoria by one of the top three experts in the field in the U.S.

I was born in 1972, so I am a child of the 1980s, though I did not experience many things other kids my age did. I was raised in a, shall we say, "sheltered environment." Many things that were common knowledge to other kids my age, or others in general, were things I did not know about and/or understand. Quite a few sexual references I did not understand, as I was not exposed to such things, and, even now, I have had very few sexual experiences in my life. I was forced to go to church, unlike most of the kids I knew. I was forced to cut my hair as a child and teen. I was adopted when I was 13 months old. My adopted parents were conservative, and my adopted mother was the driving force behind forcing me and my brother to go to church and get haircuts.

The areas where I lived were predominantly white. I would hear many derogatory comments and inappropriate jokes about anyone who wasn't white, and negative comments about religions other than Catholic or Christian. I do want to say that such comments were not, and are not, reflective of every person who lived in those areas, or of those who live in areas that are predominantly populated by people of one race or religion. There is prejudice in every area, but there are people everywhere who are not, and that is important to remember.

I also heard negative comments about anyone who was gay or lesbian. It was for that reason that I guarded closely that I was/am bisexual. And that is also why I never told anyone that I wanted to be female, and that I have felt that way since I was a child.

I had heard about cross-dressing, but I did not know that a person could get hormones to transition to the opposite gender. I wish I had known that when I was growing up, because I would likely have said something to one of my therapists. I know they would have told my parents, however, so there is a chance I may not have said anything at that time. My parents would have tried conversion therapy.

We owe it to those who came before us, and to those who have lost their lives for living their truth, to live our truth. We are the ones who must carry on the fight, to make sure we are treated equally and not like second-class citizens. We must continue the fight for those who come after us as well. We owe that to them also.

If you know someone in jail or prison my advice is to be a good advocate. Every person who is incarcerated needs supportive people out in the free world who are on their side and willing to help. You can make a positive difference.

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*Taci Vixen identifies as transgender and is an adamant supporter of LGBTQ+ rights and equality. They have written several novels and screenplays. You can follow Taci on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) at @tacivixen.*