

Falling in love gave me the courage to become a man

From the Daily Mirror magazine 20th April 2002, Kenneth talks about his experience in life with his Intersexuality and Kate shares the ups and downs in her own live.

Kenneth and Kate met on the Internet and are getting married this summer.

Just an ordinary tale of boy meets girl...

Except Ken was born intersexed and is currently waiting for a sex change operation

Kenneth MacFarlane, 19, is studying computer technology. He lives in Nottingham.

'I've been living as Kenneth MacFarlane for seven months now. On my birth certificate, I'm still a girl but I changed my name by deed poll last August. It certainly wasn't easy to suddenly start living as a man, even though that's what I felt I should have been born. It's only since I met Kate, my fiancé, that I've had the courage to make the change. This summer we're getting married, even though I'm still physically a woman.

I met Kate in a chat room on the internet in two years ago. I was role playing as a man called Ken Palpatine - the Emperor Palpatine's grandson in *Star Wars*. That's how I chose my name. I asked her how she was. She said: 'I'm having the worst day of my life.' Her mum was ill, she was feeling miserable and needed cheering up. I thought I'd just found another internet friend.

About two weeks later Kate sent me a picture. She looked really friendly. When she asked for mine, I kept making excuses. I thought if she saw me, she'd spot I was still physically a woman, even if a masculine one at that. I'd felt like a boy trapped in a girl's body since I was little. When I was five or six I'd be climbing trees, or playing with Action Man and He-Man. I can still remember making my Mum call me Simon at that age.

At 12, I went to an all girls private school. I hated it. I felt like I didn't fit in and was disgust as my female body developed. Besides, what other teenage girl develops a line of hair on her top lip and an Adam's apple?. I knew there was something wrong but I didn't know what. It was only a couple of months before I met Kate that I'd decided to find out. I'd read about transsexuals in a magazine when I was about ten but put it out of my mind during my teens. I tried to be like the other girls but it didn't work . Instead I'd go home after school and shut myself in my room.

Often I'd feel suicidal.

At 17 I'd also tried shaving in secret and sometimes I'd Sellotape my breasts flat to my chest just to see what it felt like to have a male chest. I also knew I fancied women but I didn't identify with lesbians. I think meeting Kate on the internet made me realise I had to find out what was wrong. I'd started to fall in love with her and didn't want to lie.

Soon afterwards I went to my local doctor to ask about my gender crisis. He said it might be a stage but I knew it was more than that. I told my mum a couple of weeks later during a row. 'Oh and by the way,' I shouted. 'Call me Kenneth. That's who I am I should have been born a boy.'

Mum looked shocked but didn't really say much after that.

Kate and I had started talking on the phone. People had mistaken my voice for that of a man before so she never questioned it. I'd also decided to send her a picture of myself by then and she'd just said 'You're gorgeous!' I thought: 'My God! I really do look and sound like a man!' I got scared then. I didn't want to lie to her but I didn't know if I could tell her the truth. Instead I completely cut all contact for three months.

The truth came out in August last year. One night I got really drunk and phoned her: 'It's Kenneth. I miss you. I love you,' I said, before blurting out my confession 'There's something you should know, Inside I'm a man but physically I'm a woman. I'm a freak.' Kate simply replied: 'Thank you'. I asked 'For what?' 'Being honest,' she said. 'You're the same person to me.'

With Kate's support, I've been seeing specialists. They think I might have been born inter-sex which explains why I have male characteristics like a moustache and large Adam's Apple. I've also got an extended clitoris. It's like being born neither one sex nor the other. Since I found that out in March this year, I haven't really spoken to my parents much about it, even though I do suspect mum knew something.. I remember her looking in a medical book when I was about ten.

I flew out to Oklahoma to see Kate last October. I asked her to marry me within an hour of arriving. We felt like we'd known each other all our lives.

The wedding is planned for July in Hawaii, where it's legal for two women to marry, as my birth certificate says I'm female. Then I'll have the sex change operation. It's a long process, starting with testosterone injections. The operation itself - called Phalloplasty - involves grafting skin from your forearm to construct a penis. I'll eventually have my breasts removed.

The thought of it all scares me but it's something I've got to do. We're thinking of adopting a child, one day. I'd want to be a proper husband, and a proper dad.'

Kate McCann, 27, lives in Reno, Oklahoma.

'When Ken got down on bended knee and asked me to marry him, I was thrilled. I didn't have any doubts. I just lifted his chin, kissed him and said: 'The answer's 'yes.' I knew I wanted to spend my life with him.

I fell for Ken after the first few times we chatted on the internet. I thought he was so cute. He was funny, everyone in the chatroom liked him and he seemed genuinely caring. A few days later, I phoned him and we talked for hours. In the space of the next three months, I ran up bills of \$3,500 (about £2,400) on my dad's phone, which I'm still paying off now.

I didn't think for one minute there was anything suspicious. When he kept making excuses about sending me his picture, I just thought he wasn't confident about how he looked. When eventually he did, I thought: 'Yep, that's Ken' He was just how I pictured him. I didn't think he looked feminine.

I was twisted in knots when he stopped answering my calls. I'd phone my friends crying my eyes out. I didn't know what had happened but I didn't want to pester him.

When eventually he did call again, last August, he was drunk, his voice was trembling and he sounded scared. 'I'm both,' he said. 'Both what?' I asked. 'Both male and female?' he stuttered. 'Physically I'm a woman but inside I'm a man.' I thanked him for telling me. I think any shock was overwhelmed by how glad I was to hear from him. I told him he was still Ken to me and I still loved him.

I'd been through something similar when my mum told me she was gay. She thought I'd stop loving her but people are still people. I'd had two long term relationships with men in the past, but I hadn't loved either of them as much as Ken. He was a special person, a special man, even though his body is not that of a male. I wanted to help him and decided the best thing to do, would be to support him through a sex change.

My Mum died earlier this year but she hit him when he came over to stay last October. He told her the truth ten minutes before he left. She hadn't even wondered about his sex because he looks like a man anyway, dressed in suits and wearing aftershave. Afterwards she asked if I was OK with it, and told me she liked him. My dad said: 'He's a man and a woman. Oh cool How does that work?' My parents have always been very open minded and just want me to be happy. I did lots of research after Ken told me the truth. Having a sex change is a long process but it's what will make him happy. To me, Ken is already a man and the operation is only cosmetic. But the other day, we were sitting in a restaurant when the waitress came over and asked: 'What can I get you two ladies?' It's the only time it's happened when we've been out together and I could feel him tense up. 'It's OK,' I said. 'She just doesn't know any better.'

'We do have sex and it's fulfilling because it's with Ken, even if we don't make love in the conventional manner. I've never fancied women, so I'm not a lesbian. Ken is who I go to bed with and that's who I love and that's who I hope to start a family with'