

I thought I was a girl until dad told me that I'd been born a boy

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Fourteen year old Brenda had always known she was different. Then her dad revealed the shocking truth -- she had been born a boy.

Teenager Brenda Reimer was licking an ice cream in her dad's car when she was told the news which would change her life forever.

Brenda, her dad explained carefully, was not the name she'd been given when she was born. She was called Bruce as she was, in fact, a normal, healthy boy.

However, a terrible accident during a routine circumcision burnt off his penis. And instead of attempting to reconstruct it, doctors persuaded Bruce's mum and dad to bring him up as a girl. He was operated on to remove the rest of the penis and testicles, and his parents were told that he would adapt completely to being a girl.

But Brenda, as she was now called, did not adapt. For 14 years, she lived the miserable life of a misfit. She had long hair, frilly dresses and a pretty face like any other girl.

NICKNAMES

But she also walked like a boy, fought like a boy, played boys' games - and even began to fancy girls.

Throughout her unhappy childhood, Brenda knew something was wrong. She was taunted at school with cruel nicknames such as "Cave-girl." She had no friends, male or female, because she did not fit in with either group.

Even her twin brother Brian kept his distance, tired of being teased about his "butch sister." So when her father finally told Brenda the truth, she felt a whole mix of emotions - anger, amazement, disbelief. But most of all she felt relief.

"Suddenly it all made sense why I felt the way I did. I wasn't a weirdo. I wasn't crazy," says 34-year-old David Reimer, who quickly ditched his female role and name.

He took the name David because he did not like Bruce, although anything was better than Brenda.

His conversion into a girl was part of an experiment being conducted by an American psychologist.

David's parents, Ron and Janet Reimer, from Winnipeg, Canada, were distraught when their baby suffered the horrendous injury.

They saw a string of specialists, and were told that reconstructing the penis was a difficult operation, and that their son would never have a normal sex life.

Then they met Dr John Money, who told them that humans see themselves as boy or girl not from the way they are born, but from the way they are brought up. They agreed to his plan that Bruce should become Brenda.

They thought they were doing the best for their child.

When Bruce was 22 months old he was surgically castrated, and came home to start life as a little girl. What they did not know was that for Dr Money, Brenda and her twin Brian were exciting news.

For several years he would write and talk about them, claiming them as proof that his theories were right. Without being named. Brenda was written about as "the identical twin boy whose penis was cauterized and who, now that his parents have opted for surgical reconstruction to make him appear female, has been sailing through childhood as a genuine girl."

But Brenda wasn't "sailing through." When her mum put her into her first dress, just before her second birthday, she tried to pull it off. She fought her brother for his toy cars, never wanting to play with her own dolls. She horrified other girls at school by standing up to pee. She came home from school with her clothes dirty and torn.

At seven, Brenda refused to have an operation to build her a vagina. She dreamt of a future in which she had a moustache and a sports car. At nine, she had a nervous breakdown.

"I just huddled in a corner, shaking and crying," recalls David.

The twins changed school a lot, but Brenda never fitted in.

"You can go to a thousand schools, and it's always the same. There s the girls over here and the boys over there. Where do I go? There's no belonging. So you're an outcast."

At times, to please her parents, she would struggle to be more ladylike. But by the time she was 11 it was becoming increasingly difficult.

When other girls were having their first periods and sprouting breasts, Brenda was acquiring wide, muscular shoulders, a thicker neck. and a deep voice. She was given female hormone tablets, which she tried to flush down the toilet. When her parents caught her, they supervised her taking the tablets.

She grew breasts, and a padding of flesh around her hips. Mortified, she began binge eating to disguise her female shape under fat.

OPERATIONS

When she went to a teenage birthday party, and the girls started to pair off with boys and smooch, she felt herself getting jealous.

"These people looked like they knew where they belonged", says David today.

"There was no place for me to feel comfortable with anybody or anything."

Once, at a school dance, a boy kissed her on the cheek. "I thought 'It doesn't seem right. I don't like this.'"

And at a girls' pyjama party, she couldn't join in when the others talked about boys they fancied and she found herself sexually aroused when the girls stripped off for bed.

It was only at the insistence of another psychologist, who could tell Brenda was a boy, that her parents were persuaded to tell her the truth. Brenda converted to David in a matter of months. He used tape to flatten his breasts and started wearing male clothes. He was given testosterone injections, and eventually had a double mastectomy to remove his breasts. He also had a series of operations to build a penis. He was much happier - but he was also very angry. With money saved from a paper round he bought a gun and tracked down the doctor who had carried out the botched circumcision. But he could not bring himself to use the firearm.

Brian began to introduce him as "Brenda's cousin." But there were more problems ahead. At 18, David wanted to go out with girls - but he could never go beyond kissing and holding hands. When one girl discovered that he did not have a proper penis, she told everyone - and the giggling and whispering that had dogged his childhood began again. He made the first of two suicide attempts.

By the time he was 23, his twin brother Brian was married and had fathered two young children - and David was very envious. "I got so terribly lonely," he says. "I did something I'd never done before. I prayed to God I said 'You know I've had a terrible life. But I could be a good husband if I was given the chance. I could be a good father if I was given the chance.' "

Two months later he was introduced to a friend of Brian's wife, a woman who had three children by different fathers. From the moment they met, David and Jane clicked. She already knew his story.

Today they have been happily married for nine years, and David, who works in a slaughterhouse, loves being father to her children.

MEMORIES

"I live my life through my son, because I never had any kind of childhood," he says. "I'll tell my kids about it when they are older."

David's incredible story is told in a new book, *As Nature Made Him - The Boy Who Was Raised As A Girl*. He says: "I'm sick to death of feeling ashamed of myself. That feeling will never go away."

"I was wearing a dress, had a girl's name, had long hair - you can't erase memories like that. Mum and dad wanted this to work so I would be happy. But you can't be something that you're not."