

I'M A GIRL TRAPPED IN A BOY'S BODY

by Abigail Pope/Wessex

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Jamie, 16, has felt like a girl since he was nine and now he's about to become one...

When I was about nine, I looked so much like a girl that people would say to my mum, "Gosh, isn't she beautiful?"

Looking back,

I guess it was an easy mistake to make. I've always been pretty - in fact, I've felt like a girl since I was nine years old.

When I started school, I'd wonder why I couldn't go with the girls for toilet breaks and longed to wear pretty dresses instead of boring boys' clothes. At that age, no one teased me or thought of me as being different I was just Jamie. But, by the time I was nine, I felt deep down that I really was a girl trapped in a boy's body. I'd cringe every time I looked in the mirror, hating what I saw.

Body hair

When I was 11, I started buying Immac to get rid of my rapidly- growing body hair. The people in the chemist used to stare at me, but I didn't care - I just had to get rid of any signs I was a boy.

"Jamie, what are you doing?" Mum gasped one day when she caught me with my Immac. "Boys are supposed to have body hair."

I didn't argue with her - Mum and I have always been close. My dad left when she was pregnant with me, so we've had to stick together. From then on, I just made sure she was out when I did it.

I finally realised I wanted to be a girl for real when I was 11. I was watching the *Jerry Springer Show* one day when I saw a transsexual for the first time. She was describing how, just like me, she'd felt trapped in her man's body. I was fascinated - she looked just like a woman. I suddenly realised there were other people out there who felt like me and I knew that, one day, I would be just like her.

Sex change

It was a tough decision, but a year later, when I was 12, I sat down and wrote a letter to Mum, explaining my need to be a girl. I couldn't lie to her any longer. I left it on her pillow on my way to bed and couldn't sleep 'cause I was so nervous about how she'd react. The next morning, she came into my room with tear-stained cheeks.



"Jamie, those things you wrote... you're just confused," she sobbed. I could see from the desperation in her eyes that she didn't want to believe it. But, after hours of crying and talking things through, she finally began to realise this wasn't just a phase.

That day, Mum decided we should go to the doctor, saying we needed professional advice. I'd expected to feel scared and embarrassed, but I wasn't. I'd waited for years for the chance to be able to tell someone who would understand how I was feeling.

"It could be your hormones, but it could also be something that isn't going away," the doctor told me, saying he'd send me to a gender identity specialist to make sure. He was so understanding. He smiled kindly when I explained how I hated my body and he was sensitive to Mum's feelings, too.

Mum held my hand throughout and squeezed it when she felt I was getting upset. As we walked home, she wrapped me in her arms and said, "Don't worry sweetheart, whatever happens you'll always be my Jamie. I'll always love you." I cried tears of relief. For me, the worst part -

telling my mum - was over. The fact that she accepted me mattered so much more than what the rest of the world would think.



Serious surgery

A few weeks later, the gender specialist told me that if I did decide I wanted to become a girl, I'd have to wait until I was 16 before I could start anti-testosterone injections - and until I was 18 before I could even consider surgery.

It all sounded scary and Mum was worried about the side effects and the risks, but for me it was my chance to feel comfortable with myself. Over the next four years, as I waited to turn 16, life was hard. I was jealous of other teenagers' 'normal' lives and was laughed at or called names for being feminine. At school, I had insults like "poof" and "faggot" hurled at me, but I refused to let anyone get away with abusing me.

Instead, I retaliated physically and would lash out at any girl - or boy - who slagged me off. Word soon got round that I wasn't going to take any stick and people started to leave me alone.

Luckily, I had six or seven really good friends who stuck by me. A lot of them just assumed I was gay - not that I felt like a girl trapped in a boy's body. Still, they accepted me for being Jamie.

When I was 15, I started going to consultations at the Portman Clinic in London, which specialises in gender identity cases in under- 18s.

They told me how difficult it would be changing, explaining that, if I became a woman, I might find it hard to get jobs and that people might not accept me. But I wasn't scared or nervous. It was like waiting for Christmas and I kept looking at the fashions that I'd soon be able to wear.

The truth

As my treatment drew near, Mum decided to tell the rest of our family what was happening. She told one of my aunts face-to-face and asked her to tell everyone else. My grandparents said they still loved me and my aunts, uncles and cousins were fine - except for one aunt and uncle who made it clear I wasn't welcome at their house. I only found out when they had a family gathering and I was the only one who wasn't invited. This hurt my mum more than me, especially as I'm an only child and I'm her pride and joy.

I decided to start dressing as a girl the moment I turned 16 on August 25. The night before, a hairdresser friend, Angela, came over to put long braids in my hair and a manicurist did my nails.

I went to bed in a nightie and remember thinking, "I don't need to feel trapped ever again." And with my injections starting a month later, I knew my transformation would soon begin. The next morning, I could hardly tear myself away from the mirror. I actually liked what I saw.

Over the next few days, when I went round to see my friends, I noticed local kids doing double takes when they saw me.

"Wow, Jamie- is that you? You look so much better as a girl," I shouted out one boy who used to call me horrible names.

Reactions have been mixed from people in the street. Some people look me up and down in disgust, but most believe I'm a girl and have no reason to react any differently.

I'd expected the anti-testosterone injections to hurt, but they didn't really. I started them four weeks after my 16th birthday and have to have them every month. "It's helping make me a woman," I reassured myself. The injections will carry on 'til I'm 18, then I'll start to take oestrogen tablets, which are designed to make my breasts grow, stop bodily hair growth and make my voice higher. I've just started to notice changes in my body, so they are working. I'm growing less body hair and my voice is higher.

Long wait

Because of the NHS waiting list, I'll have to wait until I'm 21 before I can have surgery to form my vagina. They won't actually remove my penis - they'll just use the skin and tissue to make my vagina.

The dangers and risks are the same as in any operation. It's major surgery and you never know what could go wrong, but it's something I've got to do. I won't have periods like other girls, 'cause I don't have ovaries or a womb, but on the outside I'll look like any other girl.

I'd like to have children one day, so I'm having my sperm frozen before the operation. That way, my sperm can be used to fertilise the egg of a surrogate mum. So I could be a mum one day, even though biologically I'd be the baby's father.

I fancy boys - especially Eminem and Jack Ryder - and I get chatted up loads by boys who think I'm a real girl. I know it won't be easy to find a man who won't judge me. - I wouldn't blame someone for being confused. But I'm sure there's someone out there!

Life as a transsexual isn't easy, but, thanks to my mum, I've got through these last few years. I've learnt that you have to stick up for yourself and, as I'd eventually like to be a singer, I think I'll need to be thick skinned! A lot of people are quick to put you down, so you must be strong. Whatever anyone else thinks, I'm proud of who I am.