



Where Justice and Truth Meet

October 2023

We...reject the societal barriers created by the misuse of power."

— A Prayer for the Life of the World



**ALLIANCE TO END
HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

Founded and Supported by U.S. Catholic Sisters

Ten years ago, **U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking** was formed as a way for Catholic sisters to work together against this modern-day slavery. At their recent conference, *Breaking Barriers to End Human Trafficking*, the group's leaders shared a 10-year anniversary video and announced the new name for the organization: **Alliance to End Human Trafficking**. This [Ten Year Anniversary Video](#) (11 minutes) details information about the group's history and its future as well as why the new name was chosen.

In past issues of WJTM, we have shared about the resources on the USCSAHT website which are now on the [Alliance to End Human Trafficking](#) website.



Stop Trafficking!
Awareness Advocacy Action
Anti-Human Trafficking Newsletter • October 2023 • Vol. 21 • No. 10
FOCUS: During this Domestic Violence Awareness Month we look at the nexus of domestic violence and human trafficking.

The **Stop Trafficking!** Newsletter is one such resource.



TRANSGENDER PERSONS, THEIR FAMILIES AND THE CHURCH

This edition of WJTM brings the third story from CHA (Catholic Health Association of the United States) booklet: *Transgender Persons, Their Families and the Church*.

As we read, continuing to learn from the life experiences of others, we are accompanied by the Spirit of wisdom and insight.

In this third edition we meet Kay, the parent of a trans boy.

The Only Boy in the World

Named Rose

BY KAY, parent of a trans boy

I am from a Midwestern city and the mother of a 17-year-old transgender son. My husband and I grew up in small, very conservative farming communities. He was raised a Christian. I was raised in the Catholic faith and attended eight years of Catholic school. In 2003 we learned that we would be having a baby *girl*. I was thrilled because I already had a son. My hopes and dreams for *her* life began immediately. Dance lessons, cheerleading, proms, homecomings, boyfriends/breakups — *her* sharing every detail with me as *she* grew up — wedding planning, grandchildren ... I could NOT wait for *her* to arrive.

And she did not disappoint. Dainty and sprite, she was a busy girl exploring all things. Everything we bought for her was girly and pink if possible — my favorite color! Dresses, hair bows, purses, dolls, kitchen sets, a Barbie jeep ... my husband joked that it looked like pink had exploded in our house. We were so happy and content.

When she was 2 ½, I placed her in the bathroom sink to brush her hair into a ponytail as I did every day, and she looked at my reflection in the mirror and said, "I a boy."

I remember tilting my head a little bit with a confused look on my face. I asked her, "What did you say?" I was sure I had misunderstood her. And she said it again, "I a boy." Every nerve ending in my body went on high alert. I had been around children my whole life and had never heard one declare that they were the opposite gender. All I could say was "Oh ... okay." And we went about our day. But I felt incredibly nervous the entire day and so very afraid. I was familiar with the term transgender, but there was no way that this could be a possibility for my child.

My husband came home and as soon as we were alone, I said, "I think we have a problem." When I

explained what happened, he immediately said, "She's 2. She has NO IDEA what she's saying." We would assume that she was confused.

As the weeks and months went by, her assertion that she was a boy began to grow. All her baby dolls were boys despite being dressed in pink. All her stuffed animals were boys. We gently tried to explain that she was a girl...she had a body like Mommy's and that she was a girl.

At her 3-year check-up, I spoke with the pediatrician alone sharing, "She's telling me she's a BOY!" I saw fear in the doctor's eyes, and I thought, "I just scared the doctor." He told me to keep plenty of girl and boy toys in the house and sent me on my way.

We were on our own to navigate this situation. My husband could not talk about it. The isolation I felt was overwhelming. We would continue with the assumption she was confused. Around the age of 3 1/2, I mentioned to her that she could be a tomboy and that tomboys were girls who liked boy things. I told her, "You don't have to be a boy to like boy things. You can be a girl who likes boy things and that's called being a tomboy." She listened intently and came back to me a few days later and said, "I know I could be a girl who likes boy things, but I'm not. I'm a boy who likes boy things."

By now, in all her pretend play she was a boy ... the father, the brother, the son — if she was watching TV, she wanted to be the male characters.

She had also started begging for a boy haircut, boy clothing, boy shoes — boy everything. Her Halloween costume requests were Spider-Man, Batman, skeletons, etc. NEVER a female character. We were exhausted. We knew we were headed down a very different path. She began asking me to pretend that she was my son during our time alone together.

During her 4-year pediatric check-up, I demanded testing — blood work to check hormone levels and an ultrasound to look for an intersex condition. Something was driving this conversation in our home, and I needed answers. All tests came back normal for a biological female.

Around this same time and after years of explaining that she was a girl and had a body like Mommy's, she asked if she would have breasts like mine when she grew up. I said, "Yes, someday." She fell on the ground sobbing so hard that I couldn't understand what she was saying. Shocked, I dropped to my knees and picked her up trying to soothe her. I could finally make out what she was saying ... "When I grow my breasts can you take me to the doctor, and can they cut them off?" I was stunned. I could only soothe her by saying if she didn't want breasts, we would help her not have them.

When she was about 4 1/2, she came to my husband and me and with a quivering lip said, "Every night I make a wish on the first star I see, but my wish isn't coming true." I knew what the wish was for and I said gently, "Not all of our wishes come true." She ran to her bedroom and lay there crying. I picked her up onto my lap. She cried, "I pray to Jesus every night to let me wake up and be a boy, but he's not answering my prayer either. Mommy, you pray ... maybe he will listen to you," she sobbed. I prayed with her.

Later that night I prayed a different prayer ... begging God, "PLEASE don't do this to my baby. It's too hard ... it's too much. Give me something to bear ... cancer ... kill me and take me out of this world ... but don't do this to my baby." The silence was deafening.

The next day I contacted a therapist. They had never treated a transgender child, and I would learn later how devastating her advice would be. She said, "Don't cut her hair, don't give her boy clothing. She will be bullied. Get her a pair of boy shorts and a boy T-shirt to wear inside your home — but DO NOT let her wear it out of the house. If she goes to a birthday party, insist that she take the pink balloon or girl party favor." She was telling us to have our child live a double life.

The therapist also said that we would have to wait until AFTER puberty to know for sure if she is transgender. I was a wreck! Puberty wouldn't happen for five to seven years! While I continued to tell my child NO to everything she asked for, I watched the sparkle in her eyes fade. I told her, "I want you to know that I love you. I love you no matter what. And there isn't anything you can do or say that will ever make me stop loving you." She



grabbed me, hugged me and I felt like a fraud. If I love her no matter what, I would love her as a transgender person. Why wasn't I listening to my gut ... to what I knew was true ... to my mother's intuition that my child was in fact a boy?

After a few more months with this therapist, I stopped seeing her. She wasn't helping us, and my child was slipping into depression.

My child kept asking me, "Why are you listening to doctors who don't know me? I know me. They don't know me." I began thinking to myself, "If God had wanted me to have a daughter, he would have given me one."

And when she was 6 and in first grade begging for a boy haircut, I made a salon appointment and got her a little pixie haircut. She was thrilled! We also got her first pair of boy sneakers. It seemed that every tiny step forward only further fueled her desire to be recognized as the boy he always was.

When she was 6 ½ and on Christmas break, she said, "I'll bet I'm the only boy in the world named Rose, aren't I?" I've never seen her look so defeated. Together, we chose a nickname, and it was the only name we used in private after that moment. We also changed the pronouns. We could only use this name and the correct pronouns at home or around people who didn't know us. But as we updated his clothing and hair, all strangers addressed our child as our son and used the correct pronouns. Unfortunately, his school refused to let him write it on papers, and when he did, they made him erase it.

Despite the small, affirmative changes we had begun making, their denial to use his nickname was incredibly painful for him, and I watched him becoming depressed again.

I began searching for a therapist with experience treating children with gender identity disorder and found one.

My husband went with me this time, and eventually the therapist told us, "Your child knows who he is. You need to give him a boy name, boy haircut, boy clothing, and find a school that will support him." It was a relief for me, but my husband looked like a bomb had just exploded. Still, we knew what we needed to do after almost five years of denying our

child the complete affirmation and support he desperately needed.

We began working on a social transition plan. We told our son that he would live as a boy in our house, and when he finished first grade, he would live as a boy ALL the time. He jumped up and down squealing with excitement.

We scheduled in-person meetings with immediate family members — mom, dad, brothers, sisters, grandparents, and sent a letter to aunts, uncles, cousins. We shared his new name and asked everyone to use it along with correct pronouns when they saw him next.

My entire large Catholic family ran to our side and fully supported our child's transition with love and empathy. Most of my husband's Christian family supported us as well.

And on his last day of first grade, which also happened to be his 7th birthday, we celebrated our bright and sweet son. It was a moment we will never forget.

We enrolled him in a private school that celebrates diversity. He shared on the first day of second grade that he is a boy, but he doesn't have a boy body.

Today, our son is 17 years old and will be a junior in our local public high school. He is a very bright, happy and well-balanced young man. Despite contending with a bit of bullying along the way, the rejection of a few family members, and the loss of some friends ... he has never relented in being male.

My husband and I believe this experience made our relationship stronger and our family closer than ever. We adore each other and could not love our two sons more.

We also joined TransParent, a national not-for-profit that provides community support and resources to families raising a transgender child of any age. There are 20 chapters today and over 1,000 members.

I believe that God blessed me with a transgender child because He knew I was capable of unconditional love for my child, and that after seeing the disparities transgender people face, I would work to help members of this community to

Sharing one's story
is heart  work

have a better life. I believe this is God's perfect plan for our family.

Sadly, last year we were told that our child could no longer receive his transgender medical care at a Catholic hospital in our city. We were told this was the decision of the Archbishop. We were given no notice, despite my child's having been a patient there for over 10 years. The shock and pain that this decision caused our child and our family are indescribable.

Treatment was halted immediately; we were told to find a new doctor. There was no compassion or caring for my child or the others ... just go away. After many phone calls to the Archbishop, the letter I eventually received from him described my child's journey "as the result of a modern culture that offers people nothing more than a confused concept of freedom in the realm of feelings and wants, or a momentary desire provoked by emotional impulses of the will of an individual."

My story proves that the Archbishop's opinion could not be more wrong.

My son *knew* that he was male and expressed that knowledge as soon as he could string his words together at 2 years old ... I a *boy*. He has NEVER — NOT ONE TIME — wavered or expressed any confusion about being male ... he has ALWAYS been clear that he is male. This is *not a feeling* ... *this is his identity and it has been hard-wired within*

his brain. The best description of the complexity and wiring of the brain is from Dr. Christof Koch, chief scientific officer at the Allen Institute for Brain Science. He says:

The human brain contains some 100 billion neurons, which together form a network of internet-like complexity. I compare it to the complexity of the Amazon rainforest. There are about as many trees in the Amazon as there are neurons in your brain. Think about what the Amazon looks like for a second.

Stories
help us
understand...

And the roots and the branches and the leaves and the vines, all of that can be compared to the tangled network formed between your brain cells because many of your neurons are in fact wired to tens of thousands of other neurons. That incredible complex network — the brain — is the most complicated object in the known universe. And so in order to help people, ultimately we need to understand the wiring and the mis-wiring.

If you as bishops issue a statement on care for transgender persons, I hope you remember that there is still much we do not know. I urge you to consult further with transgender persons, their parents, and with experts in the field in order to understand the wiring of the brain and its impact on gender identity.

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