

chronic medical conditions; why is this not the case when it comes to DSD/intersex? I realized that this had to change. To this day, “corrective surgeries” are performed on children and adults worldwide. I hope that I can bridge the gap between the medical world and the DSD/Intersex community, to create better care for all of us and to change the binary thinking that shapes too many providers’ recommendations. Having experience in medical education, I would like to educate medical students and residents and of course doctors who are open-minded enough to change their views regarding care for patients with DSD/Intersex.

Dwelling in the Gaps

Galen Sanderlin

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be a mythical being? As a hermaphrodite, I exist in a culture that sees only male or female. Those of us who don’t fit into the rigid sex binary are left out of many of the protections offered to our cousins who more neatly fit the two categories. This leaves an enormous gap in cultural definitions and societal acceptance of my fundamental being.

My journey has three main threads: 1) My personal and often rocky self-development, as I have come to understand and accept what it means to be a hermaphrodite, and finding others of my tribe; 2) recognizing the harm done by my medical treatment and actively seeking to change how the medical system treats hermaphrodites, starting from birth onwards; and 3) identifying what was done to me as a human rights violation.

I was born in January of 1975. No genetic test was done at the time. My body looked male and my assigned sex/gender was male. As a child, I gravitated toward “male” toys. In 1989, a rural-MD noted that I was not experiencing puberty like my peers and she recommended that my parents take me to a teaching hospital in Seattle for tests. A pediatrician referred me to the adolescent medical division, and from there I was referred to an

endocrinologist. After conducting many invasive tests, including drawing blood and comparing my testicles to a bead ring of ersatz testicles, the endocrinologist diagnosed me with Klinefelter’s Syndrome and a karyotype of 47,XXY. I was prescribed testosterone injections to affirm and strengthen the male identity I was assigned at birth and to prevent my body from developing secondary female sex characteristics (breasts and hips).

Soon after the shots started I bulked up, adding muscle and hair everywhere. I also became dangerously aggressive and moody. I began to have serious self-esteem issues and a drastic increase in risk-taking behavior as my body was subjected to medical intervention that my parents innocently followed.

The prescribed hormone treatment fractured my psyche—what I know now to be a common defense mechanism experienced in trauma survivors. The portion of my consciousness that existed prior to testosterone became deeply buried to prevent harm, and I experienced the emergence of a new “entity.” With each change in prescription, new fractures occurred: testosterone cypionate to enanthate shots, to patches, to gels.

The physicians did not consider my feelings or preferences during recommendations or treatment. I feel I was forced into a “male” body based on a medical emergency they created to ease societal concerns.

Last February I decided to stop hiding. Tearing the mask off has brought a flood of emotions hidden behind old traumas. I’d been living openly as an intersex person, but still deeply closeted, if not from the public—worse, from myself.

Here is the writing that came pouring out of me as I’ve been accessing my repressed memories:

I felt the first stirrings of my existence in August of 1989, like a fleeting visage of a long lost lover passing just out of view. The timing of the universe—Out of the infinite we are born, but in this case the body we are to occupy was already housing many other souls. Is this some mistake? Asked to be patient I waited . . . Late in the year of 1989 I was borne on testosterone wings into an imaginary masculine role/body.

Molded in the image of Adonis, Hermes was forced to submit. No longer sexless or ageless—lost in a sea of supposed pressures and roles. My assumed gender

was male. Why!?! Screaming, thrashing, and damaging all around me, no way to express the horror of being so brutally manhandled.

My guide Galen/Juniper were excised from our psyche—lost behind a barrier. The only solace was a shared beat: 1,2,3,4 over and over. Was this the pounding of our heart? Thank god for our love of music least we lose ourselves entirely.

Why do they insist on calling me Galen? I no longer knew who this was. I was the new occupant of this 14-year-old body. Immature? By whose measure? Looking back it is quite a wonder we survived. Around my second birthday or this body's sixteenth year the quacks tinkering with the engineering chemicals changed the mix. This tiny shift in molecules removed my legs or half of my existence and another soul came halfway into existence—except they were trapped—both in and out of corporeal and etheric realms. How rude. Why fracture an already fractured being?

To this day we do not know their name, only images and feeling pierce our psyche. We and they have accepted this arrangement; what choice do we have? To remove them is not possible and they are a fundamental part of our being and journey.

Our collective self, looking back we see devastation and lost souls. Some wander through this psyche like super-positioning popping in and out of existence as chance and chaos permeate the shifting planes of dimensional reality/variation. Each possibility stretching before us like strands of spaghetti overlapping and sticking together as possibility and wish become real and foment through action.

While Galen/Juniper were locked safely away they seemed to still be present; Galen with an astounding ability to consume enormous volumes of data and Juniper the gift of gab. It is no wonder that we are misunderstood.

In 1999 we were joined by Aphrodite. (my pharmacy mistakenly filled my prescription for depo-testosterone cypionate with depo-testodial, a high binding estrogen mixed with testosterone). Her arrival marked a massive shift in our body. Adonis was closeted along with the others. Our life has been like a revolving door—souls keep showing up. Some deciding to stay and others freaking out and causing havoc.

Our existence is like a committee meeting. Each group archetype; the fool, negotiator, etc. Except we have no leader, only a powerless figure head randomly selected. Monty Python's autonomous collective comes to mind.

I do not have a place within my own culture and native language. English does not have a pronoun for people who exist in the intersex space (neither male nor female). I cannot make plane reservations, apply for a passport, or hold a driver's license without declaring myself either male or female. I am considered an abnormal human being with a genetic disorder, not a complete being in and of myself.

Enough is enough! I've had six pharmaceutical sex changes, without informed consent; all without psychiatric care that is requisite for transgendered people. Please set us free from this medical nightmare. Leave us alone to grow and mature as the mythical beings we are.

Allowing my fractured self to heal has been an infinitely tortuous and rewarding journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance in which I have struggled to reclaim the self that society rejected and sought to obliterate. Part of the struggle is finding physicians and therapists who can help me integrate my fractured parts into a coherent whole. Like many trauma survivors, I have a hard time trusting. Sharing mythological and spiritual components of my journey, stepping into my place of authentic belonging, and coming out as hermaphrodite in a culture where the emerging realization of non-binary identity challenges longstanding social norms requires a profound trust in the process as I work through internal and external barriers to self-acceptance.

XY/XO

Lianne Simon

As a boy child I might once have thrived, but the loss of a Y chromosome in one of the first few cell divisions left me a faie half-girl struggling for life—like some changeling left in place of a human baby. My genetic mosaic of XY and XO cell lines created a fetal legacy of Turner Syndrome medical issues. Among these were delayed growth, a largely absent puberty, and micrognathia—a small jaw that feminized my face.