

Am I Accepted?: A Transgender Story

When I was five years old, my mom took me to a toy store after an extremely painful dentist appointment. Most of my toys were given to me as birthday presents and were all action figures or toy trucks. I liked those, but the toys I loved the most were my big sister's old toys. She had pretty pink ponies, plastic dolls, and little stuffed dogs with hair accessories. My parents never really liked when I played with them; I didn't know why at the time. Once we got to the store, I was jumping around in my car seat like I had drunk a whole bottle of coke. I shrieked, "TOYS!" as I ran out of the car after my mom parked. There was a slight chill in the air and the wind carried the smell of salt water from the beach nearby. As a resident of Bar Harbor, Maine, I was used to that smell and the distant sound of waves; barely to be heard in town.

"Darius, wait! Be careful!" My mom shouted to me but I was already halfway to the shop. My mom caught up with me and through heavy breaths said, "How do you have so much energy?" I shrugged as we walked into the toy store. It was a gigantic store, shelves were overflowing with colorful trinkets, games and playthings. Each rack was so stuffed, it seemed like toys were pushing each other off for a good spot in the front.

"How can I help you?" asked a tall, long limbed man with an exaggerated high pitched baby voice. I was and still am quite shy, so I hid behind my mom; cowering like a scared puppy.

"We are looking for a toy to reward him for being a good boy at the dentist," my mom replied for me.

"We have tons of boy toys in that aisle," the man said, pointing his finger to an aisle with blue, black and red toys. I ran to it, eagerly, and looked around. However, just like my birthday presents, these toys were all plastic cars and action figures. My mom wasn't watching me, so I ran over to another section, which had cool colors like pink and purple. Little girls and their parents gave me weird looks as I ran giddily through the aisle. I didn't know or care why because I had my eyes set on one toy. A big sparkly, purple My Little Pony figurine, with pretty light blue hair and long eyelashes. It came with accessories too! I grabbed it and raced to my mom yelling,

“Mama, mama! I want this one!” Startled, my mom looked from me to the toy, and then frowned. Her face suddenly flushed with embarrassment as the man from before walked up to me, looked at me holding the pony and started howling with laughter.

“I’m sorry about him; I thought he learned,” my mom told the man. She turned to me and snatched the toy out of my hand. “Why do you not get it!” she screamed her face now flaming with rage. “This is a girl’s toy, you can’t play with it, and you’re a boy! You have lost your reward!” Then she threw the toy, took me out of the store and back to our car. Needless to say, I sobbed the whole way home. It wasn’t just because I couldn’t have that toy; I realized that my mom would never let me be myself. I was different than other kids. Seven years later I am still having the same problems with my mom and new ones with classmates at school. I just can’t be myself, or at least, what I think is myself.

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“Thud,” went the waves as they crashed against the side of my banana yellow kayak. Salty sea water splashed in my face, stinging small scrapes I have from frequent summer rock climbing. I always enjoyed being outside and away from my parents in the summer. I took a breath of fresh air and smelled....dog? “Tiko, stop,” I said, laughing at my Boston terrier mix as he showered me with licks. I loved summer and kayaking with my dog in the great blue harbor. I looked behind me and faintly saw the outline of my house, a cabin right on the water’s edge. “I think we are far enough away,” I said to Tiko, who in response had a fit of sneezing. As Tiko was sniffing in the kayak’s back seat, I tore off my hot, padded jacket. Underneath the jacket was a purple dress with a little white flowers all over it and a creamed colored lace collar; my sister’s dress. I was wearing pants under my dress to help conceal what I was wearing from my parents. It was a relief to take off the hot stuffy jacket on this humid summer day. My sister gave me the dress last Hanukkah in secret saying the dress was too small for her and my sister never really wore dresses anyway. She usually wore sweatpants and a t-shirt, even on special occasions. I sat in the kayak for a while, enjoying the moment where I could wear a dress and not be judged by my parents or my classmates. My sister never judged me, she knew I was different and was alright with it. As the sun started setting, a pretty iris purple and sunflower yellow filled the sky. I threw on my jacket and started paddling through the calm waters back home.

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I woke up and it was the dreaded day, the first day of middle school. I groaned as I got up and headed toward the small bathroom me and my parents shared. The mirror hanging above the cream colored sink was still foggy from the hot shower I took last night. I wiped my hands on the mirror, getting rid of the fog and looked at my tired face. Dark circles hung under my eye making it look like I had failed putting on bottom eyeliner (which I was actually quite good at). I searched through the cabinet under the sink that was filled to the brim with my mom's makeup. I used makeup occasionally but never told my mom. I found concealer that was just my skin color and rubbed it vigorously under my eyes. "There we go," I muttered as I looked at myself in the mirror from different angles. Next up my hair, my hair was a dark, almost black, brown. It had a side part far to the left of my head and the top half of my hair curled like octopus tentacles down to about right below my ear. The under half of my hair was cut shorter than the top but not super short. It didn't take a lot to fix my hair in the morning; I combed down some of the curls and then I looked fine. Besides a few nightshade purple bruises that dotted my tan skin on my arms and legs from outdoor sports in the summer, I didn't look too bad.

As I walked back to my room, I saw my sister, Eve, walk down the steps from her room, she was a mess. She was wearing a huge sweatshirt that engulfed her. Her hair, which was chestnut brown, curly, and fell to the tips of her shoulders, was sticking up all over the place. She saw me and smiled "Hi ya, little bro," she said "Ready for middle school?"

"Totally," I said sarcastically, "And mom is not awake yet, so don't call me bro."

"Yeah, but dad might be awake,"

"You forgot?"

"What?"

"Dad went on a business trip to Europe two days ago." Our dad studied diseases and his job took him all over the world. We were used to him randomly leaving and coming back in the middle of the night or early in the morning. It was hard to keep track of when he was away or when he was home.

“Well, little sis then,” my sister said, playfully tapping me in my shoulder. I loved my sister, she was carefree, and very understanding. She was always relaxed and willing to help anyone with their problems. She didn’t care what other people thought of her and she was pretty (when she didn’t just wake up). She had amber eyes, like mine. I was a little jealous of her because she had the body I always wanted, a curved chest, soft skin, and wide hips, but no matter what my body looked like I knew I was a girl inside. My sister went to her room to get ready for her junior year of high school.

I went back to my room to get dressed. When I was in preschool, I would get up early and put on a pretty skirt or a sequenced pink shirt from a cardboard box full of my sister’s old clothes downstairs. I was very unaware of my mom not liking me being transgender until the toy incident. I thought every kid had arguments with their mother about the clothes they wanted to wear or the toys they wanted to play with. After I put on those girly clothes, I would run over to my parents and jump around ecstatically yelling, “Look, look, I am pretty like Eve! I am ready for school!” My mom would make a frowny, livid face, like the one she made when I tried to get the pony toy. My dad would just cringe and give my mom a quick “What is wrong with him” look and walk out of the room, not wanting to get involved like always. My mom would pick me up, take me to my room and force me to wear normal boy clothes. All the while I was screaming myself senseless and kicking like my life depended on it. I was embarrassed to go to school in boy’s clothes.

I decided to wear a pair of tattered jeans, a tie dyed shirt, burgundy vans and a silver locket that held a picture of my dog for the first day of sixth grade. I wished I could dress up more but I did not want to wear a polo shirt or a suit jacket. However, a skirt or a dress might have been nice, but all the kids would laugh at me and my mom would be very upset.

After breakfast, a banana with toasted rye bread, I said a quick goodbye to my half asleep mom and I ran out the door. I walked through the woods on a rugged, dirt trail in the nice summer weather until I reached my new school, Oak Branch Middle School. I got inside and a bunch of kids and teachers were running around like ants on a picnic blanket. A woman, standing in the front hallway smiled when she saw me. “Hi there,” she said with a slight southern twang in her voice, “My name’s Mrs. Nacky, I am the principal here, what is your name sweetheart?”

“Darius,” I mumbled. I really wanted to change my name to Delilah but it is not legally changed. Only my sister and my best friends call me Delilah. Mrs. Nacky nodded her head and patted me on the back as I quickly walked down the hall. I sat alone at the end of the sixth grade hallway near my locker, assigned to me during orientation. I saw some people from elementary school but none of them were actually good friends of mine. I am introverted but I have one really good friend from preschool, Samantha, who knows everything about me. She doesn’t go to my school and I still see her on weekends, occasionally to kayak together. After a while, the bell rang with a high pitched ear ringing trill and it was off to lockers, then first period for everyone. I walked to my locker trying my best not to make eye contact with anyone. The lockers were sky blue in color and slightly taller than my five foot stature. I opened my locker on the tenth try, snatched my binder and threw in my backpack as I headed towards first period, English. When I got to the hot stuffy English class people were socializing and catching up with their friends. I took a seat in the back of the classroom and waited for the bell to ring. Mr. Donza, my English teacher, was happily writing with a purple marker on his large whiteboard in front of the class. A girl with a pixie cut and braces sat next to me. She was wearing a white polo shirt, a pair of long khaki shorts and some hiking shoes. She had cool mint green eyes, light brown hair and dark skin.

“Hi!” she said waving at me.

“Um, hi” I said back.

“I’m Alex, what’s your name?”

“I’m Deli-I mean Darius.”

“Nice to meet you Deli-I mean Darias,” she said with a chuckle. I laughed awkwardly and she said, “I know I’m soooooo funny,” in a monotone. A skinny girl wearing booty shorts with long, mousy brown up in a high ponytail, yelled in a mocking tone,

“Hi Alex, have you seen how messy the girls bathroom is? Oh wait, you don’t go in the girls’ bathroom. Well, I guess I shouldn’t be complaining, at least I don’t have to go into the bathroom where all the sick kids go. Maybe that’s why you smell like vomit all the time.”

“Shut up, Cassie!” Alex yelled, “No one wants to hear about your bathroom problems, it’s the first day of school and you can’t even keep the bathroom clean!” Cassie

looked like she was going to say something else. Her cheeks were flushed red, her tiny weasel eyes scrunched up and her nostril flared on her teeny nose, but before she could say anything the first period bell rang. Mr. Donza turned around to face us, smiled and said, “Welcome to English class, in this class we are going to learn properties of good stories, how to identify theme blah blah blah blah.” Well that's not really what he said but that's what I heard; I was only partially paying attention. I kept thinking about what Cassie said to Alex. Why would Alex have to use the nurse's bathroom? I kept sneaking quick glances at Alex as I filled out the “All about Me” sheet Mr. Donza gave to us. I thought about how in elementary school I had snuck into the girls’ bathroom because, well I am a girl and I couldn’t stand going in the boys’ bathroom. All the girls were horrified of course and I got in pretty big trouble. Even though I am very shy, I am opinionated and rebellious. I gave the principal a whole lot of back talk when I was sent to his office. He said I either had to use the boys’ bathroom or the bathroom in the nurse's office. Of course my parents were mad at me and wouldn’t back me up on the case that I am a girl in a boy's body. So, I stubbornly refused to use the bathroom at school and would go in the woods as I walked home from school. I thought about why Alex would have to use the nurse's bathroom in all of my classes that first day.

During the rest of my classes, we filled out sheets so teachers and classmates could get to know us better. I skipped the gender section in all of them hoping the teachers wouldn’t notice. I would have loved to check off girl but I knew the teachers and students would laugh at me. I had another class with Alex, art, although I couldn’t bring myself to talk to her. Or him, if what I suspected was correct. After school I rushed out the door, I had made up my mind, I was going to ask Alex if she was like me. I spotted Alex unlocking a rust colored thick wheeled hybrid bike from the bike racks. I started to walk towards her when someone pushed me from behind and I fell flat on my face. My lip and tongue started bleeding and the metallic taste of blood filled my mouth. I looked up and a stocky kid with a buzz cut wearing a neon green t-shirt looked down on me and smiled a sinister grin that belonged on a Disney villain. It was Ben Savage, he used to be a good friend of mine in elementary school until I told him who I really was, then he turned on me. “Watch it freak,” He spat, “Yeah that’s right, I know you’re a tranny. Are you going to wear a dress to the spring dance? No one wants to dance with a transvestite, just remember what's in between

your legs and try to keep it covered, freak.” Some people, who saw what was happening, looked at me in disgust and others looked at Ben in disgust but no one did anything. I forced tears back, I was used to bullying. I wanted to yell something right back at him but I didn’t. I knew it wouldn’t solve anything and Ben would just laugh his stupid, wheezing laugh. I started to get up but that jerk pushed me right down again and yelled, “Well, answer my question, are you going to wear a dress or not?” Before I could do or say anything I heard a familiar voice yell,

“Leave Darius alone!” It was Alex, her jaw was set and her eyes ablaze.

“What’s it to you?” Ben snapped.

“Well, unlike you, I have friends and Darius is one of them so stop being jealous.”

Then Alex grabbed my arm and tugged me out of the crowd of people that circled around us, leaving fuming Ben behind.

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“Thanks a lot for helping me out, I wish I was brave enough to yell right back at those idiots like you are,” I said to Alex. She was walking her bike next to me, I had invited her to my house and she accepted.

“It’s not all that great” she said, “It doesn’t really solve anything, it just makes you look as mean as the people you tell it to.” Then she looked at me and I looked at her. Our eyes caught and I could tell from the way her mint green eyes looked at me that she was itching to ask me a question. I was eager to ask her one too.

“Are you...” We started to say at the same time.

“You go first,” I said with a shy smile.

“Well, I heard what that jerk, Ben, said to you and I was just wondering are you transgender? I mean are you a girl in a boy’s body?” She asked, and for the first time since I met her, she looked kind of apprehensive.

“Yes,” I answered and for some reason I felt so comfortable telling this to Alex. “I was going to ask you the same thing, just flipped. Are you a boy in a girl’s body?”

“Yeah,” He answered, “I haven’t completely come out to everyone yet, not everyone knows my proper pronouns but my parents are very accepting and their going to help spread it to the school and my family.”

“Did you change your name?”

“Actually, I didn’t. Alex has always been my name and it is conveniently gender neutral. So how about you? What’s your story?”

“Well, you’re lucky that your parents accept you. My parents are embarrassed of me. They think I am messed up in the head.” I told Alex the story of the toy store and how I dressed in my sister’s clothes. We walked through the dirt path, the smell of the sea growing stronger with each step. I told Alex about my amazing sister and dog. Alex told me about his guinea pigs and more about how he discovered he was transgender. Alex was more public about it so he was bullied a lot outside of his home and at school.

We finally got to my sea foam green house on the shore. The color reminded me of Alex’s eyes; which grew the size of dinner plates when he saw how close my house was to the sea. I told the amazed Alex about my kayaking adventures. Alex met Tiko, who joyfully decided he liked Alex and started licking him. We went up to my room with Tiko and we were sitting on my bed talking about life when Eve walked in. “I have some presents for you Delilah, I found them in my...” She cut short when she saw Alex.

“Hi there,” Alex said with the same enthusiasm as when he met me, “I’m Alex.”

“Eve,” my sister said, “nice to meet you,” Eve looked a little shocked, probably because she doesn’t see me hanging out with other kids too often. Tiko hopped off my bed and waddled towards Eve who crouched and scratched Tiko’s back, his favorite thing ever. Tiko’s tongue lolled out and we laughed.

“So what presents did you bring me?” I asked.

“Oh right, the presents.” She walked out of my room and came back with three colorful skirts and a beautiful velvet black and red dress with an elegant pattern and metal gold circles running up the middle.

“OH MY GOSH! They’re beautiful! Thank you!” I ran to my sister and hugged her. After she left, I looked at Alex and said, “Aren’t they beautiful?”

“I guess,” he answered “Well, I wouldn’t wear them but I am sure they would look awesome on you. Hey, do you want me to call you Delilah?”

“Yeah, that would be nice. You know what, I’m going to go try them on for you!”

“Ok,” Alex said. Then I ran to the bathroom. That afternoon I spent putting on a fashion show for Alex and Tiko. We also played basketball, Alex's favorite sport and one I love playing, with my sister's hoop (he creamed me). I taught Alex how to kayak also.

After Alex left, my mom came home. She pulled up in her very old beige Subaru outback while I was on the porch drawing a picture of Tiko. My mom was wearing a red pant suit, and her hair was in a tight bun. Her black heels clomped as she walked up the porch steps. A memory flashed of me putting on those heels when I was little and my mom not being happy about it. My mom frowned when she saw me and said, “I was running low on concealer this morning, do you know what happened to it?” She asked demandingly.

“Yep,” I answered, “You're not the only one with dark circles under your eyes in the morning.” My mother made her usual lemon face, the same face in the business card picture hanging around her neck. She was a manager for an outdoor clothing company and her card also had her name on it, Alison Cohen. I didn't care about her scowl, I was in an excellent mood and I didn't want my mom to ruin it. At dinner, my mom asked me and Eve about school. Eve didn't say much and neither did I. I did tell her about Alex, though, but not that he was transgender. My mom seemed delighted to hear about Alex, she was probably glad I was making friends like normal kids and that my friend was a boy. Wait until she finds out that Alex is just like me.

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Three months after the first day of middle school, Alex and I are incredibly close. We do everything together, we kayak together, even when as the water gets frigid, and we play basketball, which I am getting better at. I even started drama club with Alex after school. My mom got to meet Alex too, and she likes him. We still get bullied by jerks like Cassie and Ben, but now that I have a good friend going through the same stuff as me, it's not as awful. None of my teachers have said anything about me skipping the gender section on the “Get to know You” papers. They probably figured it was personal so they didn't ask me. I started filling in girl on forms for gender. Alex was helping me with my transition but I still had to sneak things like eyeshadow and feminine clothes to school to put on.

When the school bell for dismissal let out its piercing shrill, I headed to the chorus room for drama club. I didn't see Alex at his rusty blue locker when I walked past it. “He's

probably already there,” I thought. I was wearing a pink and white flannel today and I swiped lip gloss on my lips. I heard some people shout out some rude things but I kept on walking to drama club, where I still couldn’t find Alex. I was playing the Mad Hatter in our school’s production of Alice and Wonderland and Alex was Cheshire. I was wondering where Alex was and why he didn’t show up. After drama club, I tried calling Alex but he didn’t answer.

Later, when I got home from school, my mom was sitting out on the porch steps with Tiko next to her. She looked nervous, her forehead was creased and she was twiddling her thumbs.

“Oh Darius, I am so sorry,” She blurted out as she hugged me. I saw little tears slide down her face. I was astonished and confused, my mom never cries.

“What?” was all I could say. My mom shook her head and said,

“I was wrong for treating you the way I did all those years. I didn’t realize how it affected you, I just wanted a normal child. But I get it now, you are normal. Your friend Alex was jumped today, after school, walking to his locker. His mom called to let us know. He is going to be alright but is in the hospital. After Alex’s mom called it got me thinking, those kids that jumped Alex were just like me. They didn’t understand people who are different. I just couldn’t stand the thought of me being like them. I want to change, I don’t want you to get hurt.” I hugged my mom and started crying too, she really did care about me. My mom saw someone going through the same thing as me, and getting hurt, and then she changed her thinking. I was worried about Alex and I wanted to see him really bad but my mom said he was not in any shape for visitors. My mom also said, “Your dad is coming home in time for your twelfth birthday. You can invite anyone you want, you are going to have a coming out party.”

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My twelfth birthday was the happiest day of my life. My family including my grandparents were there with many of my classmates. Alex and Samantha were there of course, Alex with a big black eye. I even invited Cassie and Ben, who were there, probably forced by their parents. I was sitting at the top of the stairs with Tiko when I heard the ting of silverware against a glass. I heard my mom say, “Now everyone, introducing Delilah

Cohen!" Everyone started cheering as I ran down the steps in the beautiful red and black dress my sister gave me, my hair in a fancy up do and red lipstick on to match my dress. Everyone cheered as I twirled around and I thought "Finally, I know who I am. Finally, I am accepted."