

Forever with Pride

1st January 2025

Issue 38

Original Sin



Words from the editor

The New Year bursts forth with excitement and joy as people across the globe joyously embrace the dawn of a brand-new calendar year.

It's a magical moment to reflect on our LGBTQ+ journeys, set bold new goals, and fully embrace the incredible queer opportunities that await us.

For many, this is a splendid time to ignite dreams, craft resolutions, and find unique and vibrant ways to celebrate this cherished occasion for others its not so good so please do reach out to friends, family and organisations out there should you need help or support.

In this edition, you will discover a breathtaking collection of articles and links curated to spread happiness to all who delve into the pages of our e-magazine.

We aim to capture the rich tapestry of this fabulous global family, the LGBTQ+ community. From heartfelt short stories to in-depth articles, there's a treasure trove of content waiting for every reader.

As a free-to-read e-magazine, we're always on the hunt for fresh stories and unwavering support. If you feel inspired to contribute, we would be absolutely thrilled to hear from you. We also invite you to join us and become an official friend of Forever with Pride E-Magazine, where delightful benefits await. Simply drop us an email, and we'll take it from there.

Happy New Year! May it be filled with joy, overflowing with love, and brimming with all your heartfelt wishes.

Take care and stay safe,

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HAPPY NEW YEAR

2025



Salutations everyone,

Thank you for giving me this platform. Where to begin? My name is Mizieya, pronounced miz-i-yah. I'm a black gay Welsh man, residing in Wales, United Kingdom. I'm an author, vocalist, musician and Pagan. So, I figure, I need to flesh this out a bit. Wish me luck!



Let's start in reverse.

I am a survivor of sexual and mental abuse at the hands of my adoptive father and his biological son. My 'father' was a Baptist minister, my 'sibling' followed in his footsteps. As a teenager I became rebellious and angry I was in a dark place for years, eventually this led me on a journey, a spiritual awakening. Inevitably, spirituality and paganism, facilitated my spiritual growth and development.

At 20 I came out and have become stronger and liberated. I have mental health issues - silk wrapped depression amongst other things that have little hooks piercing deeply into the skin.

Refusing to let depression win and all that sails in this boat is an ongoing battle. However, an avenue I find is channelling music and writing, it's kept me sane, both routes have been a lifeline and anchor. Talking of which....



The magic, being able to write and create my own sounds and have them published. From a personal viewpoint, it's about expressing oneself. Art is all about the art. My music style has an alternative bent to it, with songs that at times can be dark whilst keeping it quite real. In essence I write from a very personal gay perspective. We become our own heroes, uplifters, truth tellers, diary keepers. However, if I see a band on stage there's a part of me that has this urge to grab the mic and start singing.

It's the vocalist in me, he gets needy. Is there a difference between heroes and influences? Probably not. We aspire to be like our role models and then grow out of that phase and find our own style, presence and form. I admire authors such as: Julian May, Mary Gentle, Robert Jordan, Fay Weldon and Frank Herbert, the latter clearly influenced Jordan's writing. Whereas Julian May is a law unto herself, a woman who was ahead of her times, a remarkable author whose works should be serialised in movies or tv.



I've always written in some shape or form. I wrote my first story, a musical, at the age of 13. After the breakup with my ex in 2014 I re-discovered writing as an outlet.

I became a member of the Welsh-based Ystradgynlais Creative Writing Group which has a brilliant facilitator and author known as Lazarus Carpenter, who's also my mentor. The challenge is to write a 500-word short story, based upon an image. I've learned a lot from this writer's family, we're in the process of publishing a second book called The Ystradgynlais Creative Writing Group Vol 2.

I find it is profoundly humbling when others perceive something in oneself that one doesn't see.

I was encouraged to write a novella which has been an incredible journey to embark upon, through the self-publishing route. As of the 30th of December, my novella The Tzi Universe, will be out in hardback in Amazon. So, you can imagine I'm quite pleased and excited about this accomplishment.

The book is a collection of short stories, whose genre is a melange of spirituality, LGBTQ, sci-fi and sci-fantasy. The illustrator Ruth Peace is phenomenal with her art. I truly appreciate her. I have another project in the works, untitled, which includes a sci-fi fantasy gay opera, short stories, with a continuation of the Tzi Universe. My website will be launched in the new year.

Thank you for letting me into your personal space for this brief moment.

Namaste

www.mixposure.com/mizieya

www.facebook.com/sentientcoven

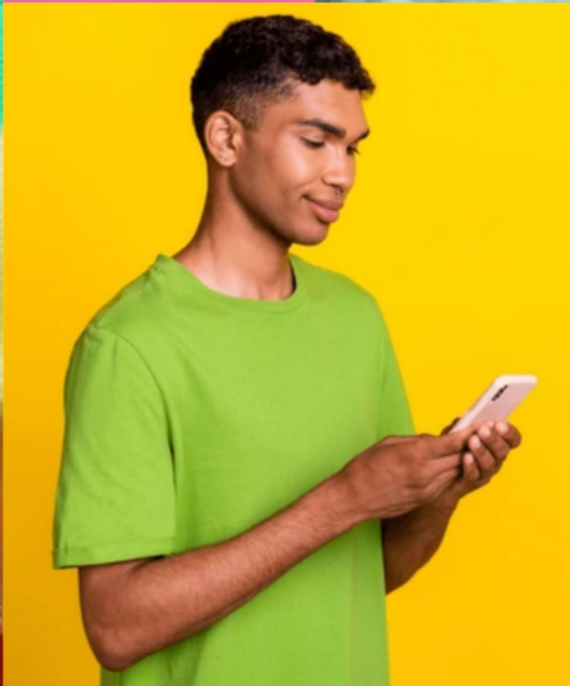
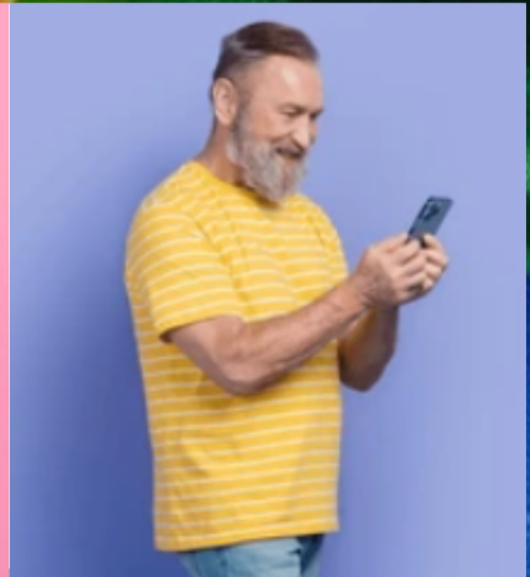
www.feiy.com/x/BV3QV

www.youtube.com/mizieya

[My New Book: amzn.eu/d/85Vu4NK](https://amzn.eu/d/85Vu4NK)

Here at Forever with Pride we're All Things Blog/Vlog & YouTube

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IT'S FREE!

Do you own an LGBTQ+ Blog or Vlog or YouTube Cannel?

Would you like to join our bloggers and vlogers and YouTubers here in FWP?

If you have answered yes and would like to share it here in Forever with Pride each month we would love to hear from you.

Oh, and joining us is free so come and get seen!



EDITOR REVIEW



I want to begin by declaring that this is a completely free and unpaid editor's review.

As someone who has navigated life with a mobility disability for numerous years, I've tried a myriad of walking aids—from sticks to crutches. Yet, I have never truly felt satisfied with any of them until now.

myself and invest in a brand-new pair of crutches, and I cannot express how thrilled I am with my choice! They arrived at my doorstep within days, and mind you, I reside on the Isle of Wight, not the mainland UK. Upon opening the package, I was greeted by the crutches, impeccably packaged and ready for use. After spending just a few moments contemplating how to resize them to suit my height, I returned to the website and discovered a user-friendly video tutorial that walked me through

Recently, I decided to indulge everything I needed to know. What a brilliant idea to have such a helpful resource just a click away!

I quickly attached the soft grips to the handholds and slid my arm into the cuff cover, and the moment I did, I felt an overwhelming sense of safety and security wash over me. It was an instant game changer!

And let me tell you, the price? What a delightful surprise! Considering the high-quality components that make up these crutches, I can confidently proclaim that they deserve a resounding five stars from me.

I wholeheartedly recommend this company and its fantastic products to anyone facing mobility challenges or those looking to purchase on behalf of someone else.

Check out their website—just take a moment to explore; they offer a plethora of fabulous items alongside bespoke options that cater to your specific needs.

I have found my go-to place for mobility aids, and I won't be shopping anywhere else going forward. Cool Crutches has earned a dedicated, loyal customer in me.

Here is their web address: www.coolcrutches.com





Forever with Pride LGBTQ+ Free to Read Monthly E-Magazine provides a much loved and valued service for the community.

It's getting harder to enjoy reading your favourite magazines due to their cost. Forever With Pride Magazine has taken care of that by launching it as a free to read e-magazine. We've stayed away from print editions, by being a digital-only publication. We need your help so we can continue to offer and even expand our free service we need your help!
Become a winner just like Roger.

Thank you for your support and good luck!

Yours sincerely,
Forever with Pride

Third prize



Roger in Highbridge supporting Forever with Pride LGBTQ+ Free to Read Monthly E-Magazine matched 2 numbers and won 3 extra tickets

Click Here To Play





January 2025

Sponsored By

**Gay Gardeners UK, Plants, Seeds and
surplus Exchange Group**

Well, that was an amazingly mild December, more wet than anything and to prove it the bulbs in my garden are growing as if it is Spring. I've actually got Snowdrops flowering and this is in the north of England not warmer Cornwall. I've never had them flowering so early. They should be the end of January at the earliest and really more usually February. Of course, what this often means is that we have still got the worst of the winter weather to come so don't get lulled with your delicate plants and seedlings, we will have plenty of frost and cold weather still to come.

I know show gardeners take their Chrysanthemum cuttings at Christmas but they have to supply heat via electric heated cables and the like. If you don't want to go to the expensive of heating then it is too early to sow seeds unless you are talking hardy ones such as Sweet Pea. Which you can sow now or leave right up until Easter, it just depends on when you want them to flower. It's not too late to plant some spring bulbs if you are hunting for bargains from your suppliers like I have been.

A lot of the garden looks pretty bleak at this time of year but if we get a mild spell, which seems quite likely, you can choose that time to move any plants around you feel need more space or are in the wrong place as they will be dormant. Just make sure you take as much root with the plant as you possibly can. You can prune but don't do it



if a frost is forecast as you may get die back on the exposed stems. It's a good time to check your fences to see if they will stand up to the winds we get in early spring.

In your winter maintenance don't forget to clean your water butts especially if you don't have lids for them as they pick up quite a bit of debris and if the light can get to the water it can become stagnant. Water at this time of year isn't an issue and they will soon get filled up again by the rain. Remove any dead leaves and other debris that will inevitably blow into your pond as it will just form a mess at the bottom if you don't.

If you haven't done it already now is a good time to order your seeds for the new season but plan first for what you need. Remember to rotate crops where possible to reduce the incidence of disease. Mulching is something else you can do if you're looking for something to do in the garden. If you're tidying leaves from your garden beware of hedgehogs that might be keeping warm inside. There are lots of birds still visiting my pond and waterfall partly for a drink and partly for a wash so don't forget their food and try and keep the frost off the water. I let my pump carry on all year so it stops the surface of the pond from freezing over – ideal for the birds.

No need to feed fish at this time of year and they usually go deeper in the water in winter. On warmer sunny days you may well see them come to the surface as it will be warmer. If you're feeling particularly energetic and have the spare time, you can always jetwash your paths and decking as these get quite dirty and slippery at this time of year although a lot of people wait until nearer Easter to do that job.

It's also a good time to buy your new season's garden supplies like pots and trays as if you leave it until March or later, you will find others will have beaten you to it and there will be items out of stock.



There are plenty of environmentally friendly options for containers these days and in the picture on the right are paper pots that you plant the whole thing when the seedlings or cuttings are big enough.

Left shows root trainers which are great for deeper rooted seedlings and cutting and these can be re-used after a wash.



Keep an eye on your Dahlias and make sure they aren't shrivelling up and that they don't have any mold developing. This will prevent spread to your other tubers. Similarly, your Fuchsias – make sure they have just enough moisture to stay alive. Too wet and they will rot. Watch out for Botrytis forming and treat with a fungicide if needed.

- Plant of the Month -

Normally this should be for winter Aconites but it seems I now have to add Snowdrops this year as mentioned earlier. So unusually you could have a variety of flowering plants in January including Christmas Rose – Hellebore, Cyclamen Coum – the hardy miniature garden cyclamen, Aconites and Snowdrops – these will give quite a range of colours and interest to what can be a bleak looking garden.



Far left – Cyclamen coum which also have attractive silvery green leaves and will cope with being covered by snow and frost.

Left – Snowdrops which come in lots of varieties and you can extend the flowering period considerably by planting multiple varieties.

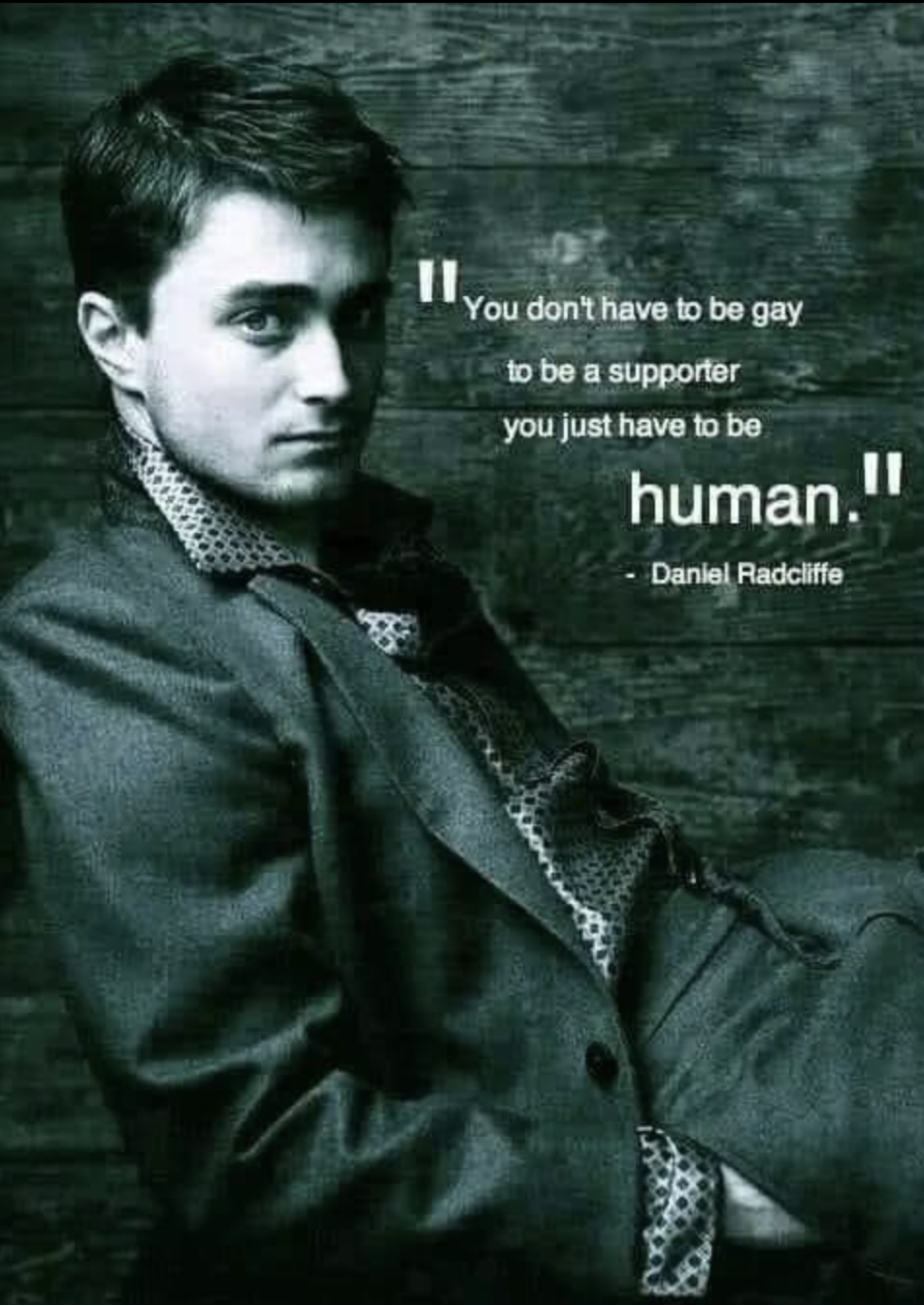
Happy New Year



LGBTQIA+ mental health



Being LGBTQIA+ isn't a mental health problem. And it doesn't cause mental health problems.

A black and white photograph of Daniel Radcliffe. He is wearing a dark, textured coat over a patterned scarf. He is looking off to the side with a serious expression. The background is dark and textured.

" You don't have to be gay
to be a supporter
you just have to be

human."

- Daniel Radcliffe



Fast forward to 2024 and Mary has performed numerous gigs across the country including a run at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and as a semi-finalist in the UK Pun Championship at De Monfort Hall as part of the Leicester Comedy Festival.

On stage Mary talks about her life as a gay mum, the trials and tribulations of parenting teenagers as well as her own mental health challenges throughout life. She does this through a combination of stories, puns and original songs performed on the keytar.

Mary Cross

"I'm a gay mum" – as a teenager growing up in the era of Section 28, these were four simple words, Mary Cross never thought she'd be able to say. What Mary never imagined, is that she would be saying them into a mic on the stage of a comedy club ... and getting a cheer in response.

Mary Cross (@marygcross on Instagram) is a comedian, podcaster and wellness champion based on the Wirral in the North of England. Despite it being her childhood ambition, Mary didn't try her hand at stand-up comedy until the age of 45 when she performed at her first open mic at Hot Water Comedy Club in Liverpool.

This all came about after Mary saw a poster for a comedy workshop in Manchester in 2020 and she decided to finally take the plunge and follow her lifelong dream.



She has performed at several queer nights including So Hilarious at the Feel-Good Club in Manchester (hosted and run by queer comedian Jane Postlethwaite), Queer as Joke in Birmingham and Queer Like Funny in Nottingham.

"I love performing at LGBTQ+ comedy nights as there's a total freedom on stage to share the unique experiences of being a member of the queer community with an audience who really gets it. It also makes me realise how far I've come in terms of being open about my own sexuality when I didn't come out until I was 25 but I can now stand on stage proudly declaring I'm gay".

Mary wanted to create her own safe and welcoming space for comedy (for comedians and audiences alike) so that she could champion the voices of female/female identifying/NB, LGBTQ+ and neurodivergent performers and so she launched her own comedy night, Bliss Comedy (@blisscomedynights on Instagram) on the Wirral. Bliss Comedy had 4 sell out shows in 2024 including a night for the Brain Charity as part of the

Neurodiversity Arts Festival in Liverpool which championed 5 female neurodiverse comedians and had full BSL interpretation to make the night as accessible as possible.

Comedy has been central to Mary's mental health, and she incorporates this as part of her Building Bliss (@buildingblisstoday on Instagram) wellness channel and podcast. Mary set up Building Bliss over 5 years ago after going on her own healing journey and she wants to spread the word that wellness is accessible to everyone.

The Building Bliss Podcast (youtube.com/@buildingblisstoday) launched in February 2024 and in each episode, Mary interviews a guest who has overcome adversity or a significant life event through the 5 pillars of BLISS – Bravery, Laughter, Inspiration, Spark and Success. There have been a wide array of themes including leaving a religious cult, escaping a coercive relationship after 20 years and dealing with alcoholism and the next series of the podcast will be released in February 2025.

"I believe laughter is one of the most powerful tools we have in our possession to uplift our mood, improve our mental health and form bonds with others. What stood out with all the podcast guests was how critical laughter was in getting them through the absolute worst times in their lives and that even in the depths of despair, they could still find a moment to laugh and take the load off their minds."



WOMEN IN COMEDY FESTIVAL

NIGHT



Mary will shortly be launching her new radio show "Laugh More – Live Well" on Wirral Wave Radio which will be an hour of wellness based content centred on laughter along with uplifting music, practical exercises and some guest coaching experts.



Building Bliss

with Mary Cross



Building Bliss website www.buildingbliss.co.uk

Building Bliss podcasts <https://youtube.com/@buildingblisstoday?si=7-TSMvhjmelzHT9T>



Neurodivergent people at higher risk of exploitation

Research has found that adults with learning disabilities, neurodivergence and mental health issues have a higher risk of experiencing modern slavery than other adults.

This group, which can include people with autism, ADHD, dementia, brain injuries, or personality disorders, can be overlooked when discussing exploitation risks, but are disproportionately more likely to be targeted, manipulated, and controlled by criminals.

They are believed to be more vulnerable as they may be less able to recognise coercive behaviour, and are therefore targeted for county lines drug supply, home-takeover (cuckooing), forced labour, and sexual exploitation.

Causeway recently hosted a webinar with experts from across the fields of neurodivergence, the justice system, and safeguarding. Topics discussed included ways to identify and safeguard vulnerable adults, why and how they were targeted for exploitation, how to support someone being exploited, and how to prevent it from happening.

You can find out more, or donate to Causeway's work, by visiting their [website](#).



E-MAGAZINE

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2025



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The EXPLODING BOY





The Exploding Boy ***by Monty Wolfe***

Growing up gay in rural Louisiana, Monty Wolfe battled his loneliness by immersing himself in cinema.

He found kinship and inspiration in the misfits and marginalized underdogs in movies. His VCR became his priest, therapist, and teacher all rolled into one. His love of movies eventually matured into a love of filmmaking, and he made his first films using a second-hand 8mm film camera.



Monty Wolfe

After a decade in television news, Monty moved to Portland, Oregon where he attended Portland State University School of Film and received a BA in film.

As part of his studies, he put together his first award-winning gay short, *In Pieces*.

Encouraged by the success, Monty would go on to write, produce, direct, and edit more award-winning LGBTQ-themed shorts. His films teeter between earnest and ironic, wholesome and decadent, grounded and surreal. Regardless of genre or tone, his gay protagonists always find love, drawn to each other, cosmically pulled together, as if finding a same-sex soulmate is fated and inevitable.

His films are hopeful and optimistic, no doubt a reaction to the trauma of coming of age during the height of the AIDS epidemic, when the prospects of a *happily ever after* seemed hopelessly impossible.



The Exploding Boy is a quirky independent film that tells the story of Alex Silver, a talented but angsty teen who dreams of becoming the next Jim Henson.

Unfortunately, his life is no happy puppet show. His dad is overbearing, his school is oppressive, and even people in the neighbourhood seem out to get him.

But everything changes when Julius, a mysterious transfer student, enters his life.



The film was financed with the director's weekly pay checks, the generosity of friends, and a couple of high interest credit cards.

It was shot over a year, dealing with the relentless Pacific Northwest rains and Covid 19; nevertheless, the cast and crew persevered and ended up with a delightfully positive film about friendship and vulnerability.

The Exploding Boy wowed on the festival circuit, playing across the United States and in Australia, and winning numerous awards, including Best Actor and Best Drama Feature at the Oregon Independent Film Festival.

The Exploding Boy is currently streaming on Prime, Prime UK, Gay Binge TV, Vimeo, and Apple TV. It's also available on DVD and Blu-Ray through TLA Video.





www.imdb.com/name/nm9972592/?ref_ext_shr_inlk

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Finding Home in Music

HOME is an album about self-reflection and personal growth. Creating it involved a journey from Middle of the Map, USA to the outskirts of London. Home is indeed where the heart is found, and with music in the heart, home can present itself in some unexpected places.

HOME



Blake Rave

Recorded at Weeks Weeks Weeks Studio (weekswkswkswkswk.com) in a chapel built in the late 1870s, the spirit of this album reveals itself as an apparition of past, present and future. This intimate portrait of mental health, first dates, heartbreaks and discovering a home within came to life in a foreign land, a land which spawned an unexpected love and a new world of possibilities.



@blakeravemusic



Finding Love in Strange Places

For the Lovers and the Dreamers



Patrick C Notchtree

Author

I am a member of the so-called 'golden generation' that was born just after the second world war, 1946 in my case, who have lived through a time of increasing prosperity and social and health care.

I suppose I knew from an early age I was gay but without defining it as such. My first love was a boy two years older than me but circumstances cruelly tore us apart. It was highly illegal then as well as being seen as socially unacceptable. But trying to repress one's true sexuality is not a good idea and, sadly, I failed disastrously at one point.

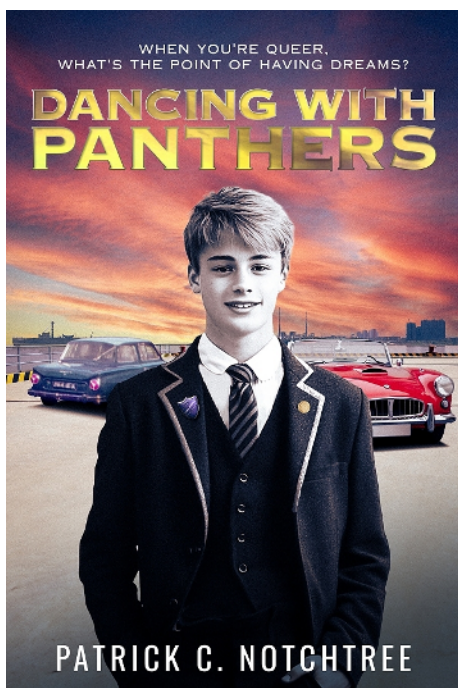
Things have thankfully changed since then, but I will refrain from putting too much biographical detail here, as that would be a spoiler for my memoir. I wrote my own memoir, "The Clouds Still Hang", some years ago. The true story of my life. The only fictional elements are that I have changed the names of people and some place names. The events, good, bad and ugly, are true.

Then I wrote a couple of non-fiction books. One is "A Short Guide to Islam" based on notes I found from years earlier (written on a BBC B machine!) and updated of course. Islam is more than just a religion as the term is usually seen in the west by most people. It is a whole way of life and is central to a Muslim's existence. But is this scary? Fear can often be explained by ignorance of the other and I hope that this little book will help in

A publisher came across a website where I outlined my unique method of placing apostrophes correctly and they published that as "Apostrophe Catastrophe". Journalist John Humphrys told me he had tried to break my system and failed! The apostrophe must be the most misunderstood and misused piece of punctuation in the language. This is made worse by the fact that most people simply fail to understand what it does, and make it unnecessarily complicated. In fact, using the apostrophe correctly is easy - once

I write whatever comes to me. A few years ago I came across an extraordinary young man and when I said I had written by memoir, he told me to write his. So that is how my award winning novel "Maxym" came about. Maxym is a beautiful, loving and lovable young Russian man Growing up in a Russia plagued by homophobia, Maxym wrestles with his suppressed homosexuality. But his exceptional marksmanship skills make him a coveted asset. Trained to be an unrelenting assassin, he walks a precarious tightrope, embodying a paradoxical blend of tender affections and unwavering loyalty to the nation that nurtured him.

Maxym's insatiable thirst for revenge for his murdered family propels him into perilous missions across Syria, Africa, Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan, amassing immense wealth at a young age. However, the year 2022 brings with it a reckoning in Ukraine. In Maxym's journey lies a poignant exploration of the intricate bond between Ukraine and Russia. The stifling atmosphere of Putin's Russia forces him to conceal his true sexual identity, facing mounting danger as time progresses.



This gripping tale unravels the extraordinary life of a young Russian, set against the backdrop of a 21st-century ordinary Russian family.

Once that was done I decided to write an even more controversial novel for which I drew on my own past experiences and that is now out and is "Dancing with Panthers". When tall, fair, good looking but lonely Mark Martin living in northern England is offered a lot of money in 1961, aged just fourteen, it sets him off in a whole new direction as a rent boy.

At the same time he becomes labelled a hero so his public profile is raised at a time when he wants to keep certain things very private. How does he balance these two? Highly respected and destined for success, he is later forced to escape across the world on a wild adventure with his protector and lover but finds himself in even more danger. Warning: The issue of paedophilia is examined from the point of view of the child for which I drew on some of my own experience as a teenager in the 1960s.

My memoir, "Maxym" and "Dancing with Panthers" are not for under 18s or the faint hearted. All are available on Amazon for Kindle, in print and audio. More information and links to the book websites and video trailers etc. at my website, www.notchtree.com/

Patrick C Notchtree

www.notchtree.com

www.amazon.com/author/pcnotchtree



"Lucky you," said Tommy. "
Yeah I had a boyfriend."
"Well, you have one now,"
said Mark.

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The Devil Wears Prada



There's a very large high heel on top of the marquee at the Dominion Theatre announcing the arrival of the much anticipated 'The Devil Wears Prada.'

Underneath it states, 'a new musical' and 'music by Elton John'. Well it sure is a new musical, but the music is totally unforgettable.



Based on the very popular 2006 movie - about the relationship between a high powered fashion magazine editor and her aspiring journalist assistant - is making its debut in London's glittering West End - and unfortunately adds a few mothballs to the memory of the movie, and doesn't really offer anything new and exciting - it's a safe production, enjoyable but unmemorable.

The story, as you may remember, is about Andy, who wants to be a journalist, and gets a job as the assistant to Miranda Priestly, an editor modelled on the icy Anna Wintour of Vogue Magazine.

The petite Georgie Buckland (making her West End debut) has the acting and singing chops as Andy, but it is all too easy for her to get one of the most coveted, and demanding, and scary jobs in publishing - assistant to Priestly.

Vanessa Williams, mega television star (Ugly Betty) returns to the West End stage (after 2019's City of Angels). Here she's just merely a presence on stage - we really don't feel the power (and terror) that was so acutely portrayed by Meryl Streep in the movie. Williams gently floats around wearing one beautiful design after another - the writers have made her out to be a caricature of Wintour. Williams doesn't have that many songs to sing, and when she does it's a bit obvious that she's no Nicole Sherzinger (brilliant in 'Sunset Boulevard') nor a Patti Lupone (though to her credit she has been nominated for 11 Grammy Awards - never won).

The saving graces for this show, besides Buckland, are the simply gorgeous outfits - designed by Pamela Roland - (well this is a show about a fashion magazine so that makes sense).

Kudos to costume designer Greg Barnes for putting it all together, with sumptuous shoes by Terry De Havilland. And if weren't for Amy Di Bartolomeo who plays Priestly's first assistant Emily this show would be off the rack. Amy/Emily has the best lines, she's sharp and witty, really really wants to go to Paris for Paris Fashion week with Priestly, and has dreamed about it all her life. Di Bartolomeo plays her to perfection, with witty dialogue, and is mostly deserving of any awards she will receive for this role. Matt Henry, meanwhile, as the magazine's fashion director, is no Andre Leon Tally!

But let's get back to the music. Sure, this is billed as a musical, but none of the songs are memorable, and some are complete duds that don't have any relation to the story at all. Songs with titles such as 'Dress Your Way Up' and 'Seen' and 'I Only Love you for Your Body' are downright strange, and I couldn't help but shudder while they were sung. Elton - what were you thinking? The songs in 'Billy Elliott', 'Aida' and 'The Lion King' were fantastic, here they are not.

Kate Wetherhead could've taken some risks with the Book but she didn't and the stage show mimics the movie - nothing new is added, not even anything topical (me too movement, politics.....). Though some parts of the story in the movie have had to be reworked or removed.

'The Devil Wears Prada' played its first American Chicago production on July 19, 2022, and played a limited run through August 21, 2022. The run was billed as pre-Broadway (it never did make it to Broadway).

In a September 2022 interview with Zoe Ball, Elton John stated the show was not ready for subsequent stagings, adding "It'll be ready in about another year. Well two years later (and after a two month try out in Plymouth, UK) this is what we've been given.

The Chicago production received universally poor reviews. In the New York Post, Johnny Oleksinski said the show was "alarmingly un-fun and sluggish," adding that "every song is lousy, and there is nothing here worth fixing.

London reviews have been just as harsh as well. The Independent stated 'Elton John can't save this truly diabolical production' while The Telegraph calls it a 'so so musical.' It's not as bad as these reviews make it out to seem, it's a fun show to watch and it will be a fun night out, but it doesn't stay with you long after you leave the theatre (a year later 'Sunset Boulevard' is still with me). For what's its worth, 'The Devil Wears Prada' is recommendable and enjoyable.

'The Devil Wears Prada' is playing well into 2025.

www.devilwearspradamusical.com





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Since 2019, I have worked with the homeless and street community and it was in that time, I became a celebrant initially to ensure the homeless community would receive a dignified funeral. Often there would be no family involved, and the funeral would be welfare funded, which of course would mean a service was not given. I pride myself in providing a dignified service for the homeless community free of charge.



In progressing my career as a Family and Funeral Celebrant I have the honour and privilege to celebrate with you, your life milestones both in life and death, tailored to meet your needs.

As a member of the LGBT+ community, I offer my peers an understanding of the importance to celebrate with a personal ceremony just as you would want it to be. It will incorporate the elements and personal touches that you choose.

It is your ceremony, whether that be an affirmation ceremony, wedding, vow renewal, family commitment or any other service I can tailor for you. This be your memory to hold on to for the rest of your lives.

I also take pleasure in working with couples who may not be part of the queer community but are our Allies and may even have members of the LGBTQI+ community within their family and friends and want to ensure their wedding ceremony is truly inclusive and welcoming of them too.

Naming ceremonies are not only for new-borns but for anyone. In particular, I have the privilege to carry out transgender affirmation or naming ceremonies.

Wedding and vow renewal ceremonies are given the upmost attention to ensure your day is exactly as you wish. Wedding ceremonies will of course be in accordance with the legal requirements of the Registrar official documentation.

Many couples marrying or renewing their vows look to a Family Commitment Ceremony to include their children in their ceremony. Children play an important role in a marriage, whether they are the couple's children together, or from previous relationships bringing both families together. This is symbolised lighting of a family unit candle.



Funeral services are always dignified and again tailored to the requirements of a loved one's family regardless of their life's choices.

I have had the privilege of being able to sit with individuals at the End-Of-Life to write a service as they want it. This is a humbling experience that offers a special service that feels more personalised, family and friends commented that they could just hear their loved one saying the words I delivered. This gives our loved ones the opportunity to have their final say, which is normally with their sense of humour injected. The End-Of-Life funeral service is the most humbling and sincere service I provide.

As a celebrant, I have the honour and privilege in conducting ceremonies that mark some of life's biggest milestones. As well as officiating weddings, celebrants officiate at vow renewals, baby naming ceremonies and funerals. For each of the services I offer, you can be assured that I will create a bespoke, meaningful ceremony that is tailored to your needs and requirements.

In addition to those mentioned above, other services that I officiate, include:

- **Family Commitment Ceremonies**
- **Coming out celebrations**
- **Civil Partnerships**
- **Same Gender Marriages**
- **Transgender Affirmation Ceremonies**
- **Memorial Services**

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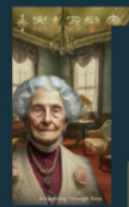
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Merry Christmas & Happy New Year

Tales of the Second City

Misadventures on Birmingham's Gay Scene

Please Don't Let Me Trip

I didn't exactly explode onto Birmingham's gay scene in glorious rainbow technicolour, more creep apprehensively down a flight of steep stairs... and straight into a familiar face!

In my late teens, Friday nights were spent alternating between several pubs on the social triangle of Aston University. I'd been drinking on campus for months prior to turning the legal age, but being student pubs, used to a clientele of fresh-faced undergrads, our spotty faces barely stood out. Doormen would turn a blind eye if you could rattle off your fake date of birth with enough conviction.

On one evening though, I couldn't shake thoughts of another bar in town, the idea of which ignited my teenage hormones like a drop of blood attracting a hunting shark. I decisively downed the dregs of my

The Jester was a basement gay bar, lurking beneath Scala House, a shabby curve of concrete and glass on Holloway Circus. This typical 1960's development, of the style old school Birmingham is notorious, had seen better days, even back in the 80s. I paced outside for an age, heart racing, and trying to muster the courage to go inside, but somebody would walk by, or a night bus would circle the roundabout, and I would lose my nerve. Finally, the coast was clear, and I dashed for the door. The unremarkable entrance took me to a tight flight of stairs leading down into... a new world of misadventure.

My heart pounded with a giddy mix of fear and anticipation, as I descended the steep stairs. All I could think was, please, don't let me trip.

I gripped the handrail with white-knuckled intensity, while trying to convey casual nonchalance. I managed to reach the bottom of the stairs upright and with the maximum dignity a gawky teen could muster.

Guys turned to check out the new chicken in town. I crossed to the elliptical central bar and ordered a beer.

Waiting for the barman to return with my drink, I dared a quick glance around, taking in the small dancefloor, neon lighting, and, to my delight, a glitterball. They actually had a glitterball! My only knowledge of gay bars came solely from The Blue Oyster in the movie Police Academy, which had a glitterball, beneath which the Leather Queens danced romantically. I was now convinced that every gay venue in the world had one.

I clocked one cute guy around the curve of the bar to my left. He looks very handsome, I thought, around my age, chiselled jawline, slicked-back black hair. Oh, hang on... It's a lesbian.

My drink arrived. I let out a soft sigh of relief. I had made it inside, down the stairs, and got a drink, all without incident. The night was mine!

A hand fell upon my shoulder.

"How are you, young man?"

I turned to find the benignly smiling face... of my form teacher.

Sat at a bar with my schoolteacher wasn't exactly how I'd expected my first night on the scene to turn out... but I could not have wanted for a better introduction.

It was a relief to finally have another gay man to confide in, even better that it was a familiar and trusted figure. Here was an opportunity to talk to someone with experience of a world I was taking my first fledgling flight into.

Although being caught in a gay bar by Sir had been a shock, I had not been surprised that he frequented such establishments. Rumours had circulated school for years. The handlebar moustache, penchant for a leather jacket, and the general Village People vibe had also been a bit of a giveaway. He wouldn't have looked out of place swaying beneath that glitterball at The Blue Oyster.

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At the end of the night, Sir drove me home, discreetly dropping me off a few streets away from my house, so as not to arouse the suspicions of sleepless parents, inevitably awaiting their teenage son's late-night return.

I am eternally grateful to my then form teacher for looking after me on my first night out on Birmingham's gay scene.

I have told this tale many times over the years, inevitably greeted by cynical eyebrows and the implication he was on the make... but no, he was the perfect gentleman.

To Sir, With Love. X

Find more tales from the gayside of the UK's second city at:

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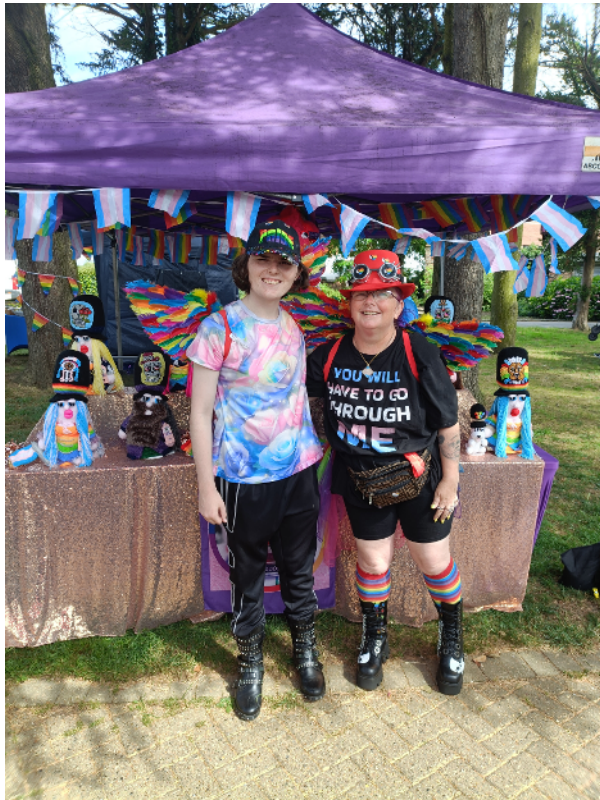
Ami

My name is Ami. I am 25 years old and I came out as a Transgender Woman 4 years ago and I have not regretted it in the least. I now have a great job, I have picked up many different hobbies, such as tabletop RPGs, found different social groups like the team at Diversify, who meet up once a month in Ashford Coachworks and I help my mum with her hobby business, Wacadoddles, as pictured, who sell steampunk woollen dolls and steampunk-themed accessories.

Before I came out, I found it hard to live as myself. I did not have much of a social life and I had a lowered sense of self-esteem. The first person I told that I was Trans was my mum and I talked with her about what my new name would be. I decided on Ami. It was an unconventional spelling of the name 'Amy'. The reason why I went for this spelling was because it looked unique.

When I came out as Trans, I was in my third year of university, studying History and Politics, two topics I was interested in, especially History. However, it was difficult for me to engage with my studies. I became depressed throughout my second year of university. At the end of my third year, I remember there was an extra credit course.

Honestly, I don't recall what this course was about, but what I do remember was that I decided to introduce myself to this new group of people as Ami. There were no issues with the lecturers who conducted the course or the other students.



Me and Mum Deborah

I will admit that my personal struggles as a Transgender person tended to be internal rather than external, most of the external struggle in my immediate vicinity was misgendering in social settings. I also am prone to 'doom scrolling' and getting worked up over the policies and public figures that are transphobic.

Internally, I had my doubts about whether I am really a "genuine transgender person".

I internalised much of the pseudoscience and misinformation about Transgender people, that it was a "fetish", that I was "cringe" or an unnecessary and unhealthy obsession with "passing" as a woman.

I understand the idea and need that a Transgender person may want or need to "pass" as their gender. The reasons for this could be personal safety in the face of violent retribution, Gender Dysphoria, or simply the need to look the way you want, which is a desire that many people share, no matter the background. Not worrying about passing is also a valid option and may be preferred by some people.

However, I will give some advice that has helped me be more comfortable in myself: do not obsess over the little details. Staring into a mirror will make you find things wrong with your appearance. While looking in a mirror can help with the technical aspect of appearance, it is best to ask others if you pass well. Find a fashion style that you are comfortable with. For me, this was a massive boost in confidence. I also found that fixing my hair and getting it into a style that I want helped a lot. One part of passing that I found the most difficult was voice training. In the end, I found it very difficult to wrap my head around the different muscles that I would need to use to change my voice. Just know that voice is not the be all, end all of passing, no one feature is since we are all unique.

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My final words to any other Transgender person is that things may be scary now and that both internal and external factors can make life difficult, but it is best to spend time on helping yourself, practice self-care and know that you are not alone. I am here to root for all of you! My words to any allies that may be reading is a sincere thank you. You help us to fight for our rights. Allies can keep going in our stead when our self-advocating becomes exhausting or dangerous. My advice to allies is to always strive to be the best person you can be. Do not be scared to offend, rather learn from any mistakes.



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