

# Touching the Surface: Trans Voices in Ireland





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## Foreword

There is an inherent power in seeing yourself represented – in words, images or art.

As a trans man, I learned this first hand. When I was coming to terms with my gender identity, I used to spend hours in the McGill University library in Montreal. I pored over images and narratives, trying to find myself represented, trying to find pieces of a puzzle that I would recognise – something that would make me feel that I was not alone.

In a country where trans people are often invisible, *Touching the Surface: Trans Voices in Ireland* creates a lasting, celebratory space for trans identities. We are literally writing ourselves into existence.

*How do we find our voice? What stories do we choose to tell?* The process has offered us a chance to learn our own language. Together, these contributions form a unique jigsaw that is both educational and empowering – not only for us as individuals, but for others, who will sit in a library or search online and look for voices that resonate, reminding them that they are not alone.

*Broden Giambrone*

When we first talked about a project to represent and celebrate trans people in Ireland, we paused. *Would we get enough people?*

It wasn't a question of numbers of trans people in Ireland – this country has enough trans folk for a whole series of books. The question was one of visibility. Trans awareness and understanding are blossoming in this country, but we have a way to go. There's still fear and bias – which translate into jeering and anger and violence – not to mention a lack of human rights. *Would enough people feel secure enough to risk contributing? Had Ireland come far enough?*

We were inundated. People showed courage and enthusiasm in telling their own stories – from vulnerable memoirs to defiant poetry. The project struck a chord with many, and the support to see it through to completion has been immense.

We hope that this volume stands as a visible, public reminder: trans people in Ireland are our children, parents, colleagues; they are our teachers, entertainers, human rights activists and political lobbyists. They are integral.

As with any collection, *Touching the Surface* is a snapshot of where Ireland is, today. Editing the contributions, I was struck by the resilience and hope of the voices within: they highlight the progress made, and the many challenges ahead.

I'm looking forward to Volume 2.

*Orlaith O'Sullivan*



# The Leaves

*by Lydia Foy*

The leaves are multicoloured now  
They are like Red Sea fishes  
Like jellied sweets  
Or other tasty dishes

The ones that turn to chocolate  
The ones just yellow found  
Have taken all our wishes  
With them to the ground

The fall is then  
The rise again  
The phoenix and the hope  
These colours precious to  
The senses' periscope

As flowers emerge in Spring  
So tentatively  
So we caution optimism  
As we hope to see

Another Spring and Summer  
Very full of flowers  
That leaves have shown  
In Autumn  
That this change endures

Once more to Nature's splendour  
Such relief  
We find then  
No betrayal this time  
Happy once again



Lydia Foy

# A Transparent Life

by Vanessa Lacey

My very first memory is kneeling at the settee in our home in Waterford City. My Mam is sitting behind me. It's the 1960s: I'm 4 or 5 years of age. I'm cutting the dresses out of the *Bunty* magazine. I remember being extremely comfortable being me.

Over the years, that feeling of ease changed: I felt that I had to perform the Male role or suffer the consequences. I did it successfully, appearing to the outside world as what I was presenting as: a boy, and then a man. On the inside, I was dying a slow death.

I didn't know what or who I was. At that time in Ireland, there were no words to describe me. I was a thing. God's big mistake. An idiot. Disgusting. All these terms and many more. Really, I was an actress playing a role, and I performed well. But I was creating an illusion, and as I grew older, more people entered my world of illusion. People I loved were being sucked in to my façade, and it became more and more difficult to sustain.

In 2007, my façade finally became unbearable. Enough was enough. I couldn't perform any longer, and I couldn't see a way through. The people I loved suffered so much. Looking back, I feel this is the price we pay for not being our authentic selves, for not being understood, for a stigma being attached to the word Transgender. This is why today I work so hard to change people's attitudes, why I urge people to raise awareness of our issues. Enough is enough.

Back then, I seriously considered suicide. I thought there was no other option. I was wrong. There were – and are – always other options. With the help from the LGBT community in Waterford, my wonderful children, a counsellor and my true friends, I challenged my façade. I broke down fear. I tore up the stigma. Those years were mixed. I faced many losses and much rejection. It almost broke my heart to see my mother dying – and worse, to look on as a stranger at her funeral.

But the gains were immeasurable. Living my life as me. Living my authentic life. I never would have believed that I could live my life, but here it was happening before my eyes. I felt sad changing my name – the name my parents gave me – but I really like my chosen name. Vanessa suits me, I think. I feel so content living my life as the woman I always knew that I was. I sometimes cannot believe how lucky I am: to have such wonderful people in my life; to graduate from College; to work with TENI. What I find remarkable is that I drew strength out of somewhere to do all these things. I am in a position to raise awareness and change attitudes: to me, that is a gift from somewhere in the universe, and I am grateful for that.

Now, everyday, I am sitting at that settee, with my Mam behind me. I am cutting out those dresses from the *Bunty*. I am living a life, my life, a life that is transparent. There's no façade. I am the luckiest woman on the planet.



Vanessa Lacey





Cat McIlroy

## Liminal Being

*by Cat McIlroy*

### Ambiguous

Invisible, between two different places; in between or elsewhere

What are you? Forms and limits unknown

Catalyst or outlaw – magician, trickster or mistake?

Uncertainty is the game; confusion is the prize.

Trespassing through no man's land

On a journey to my soul

Transformation or life in limbo: a special place

In time and space, a threshold between more than one

Without being either – a seashore betwixt and between.

Liminal; a shape shifter

I walk unrecognised – a fiction

Transcendent, beyond understanding, slipping through

The masks of myth and fantasy.

A body, unique, transforming yet still me

This wondrous experience, being liminal > me.

# He and She

*by Susan*

He Sitting in reception waiting for my turn  
Old folks and kids, time to burn.  
Receptionists in slacks brings out a frown,  
A chance to dress up, not to dress down.  
Dreary surroundings, piped music a bore  
Suddenly to break silence: a knock on the door.

Entered she did with style and grace  
Men's hearts beating with up-tempo pace.  
Nylon-clad legs and black high heels  
The attention bestowed she suddenly feels.  
Taking a seat she ignores the stares  
From dirty auld men and a guy in flares.

She **Mum, why didn't I listen and take your advice  
Stockings and high heels aren't always so nice.  
Trousers with flat shoes practical and fair  
The looks I'm getting are more than I can bear.  
The interview I had earlier that same day  
Demanded this attire, what more can I say.**

He I know she's not happy her smile has vanished  
Stupid men that leer should leave and be banished  
I look in admiration, so feminine and chic  
A vision of beauty, stylish and slick.  
It's an image I have tried so often to create  
Little does she know, my mum or best mate.

Now I wish I was alone in my room  
With my secret stash no worries or gloom.  
Transform myself to woman from man  
Applying my make-up the best I can  
Oh how I wish that I could look like her  
Lady like, womanly, called miss not sir.

She **That old man is still staring and so is that lad  
I like his long hair and his looks ain't so bad.  
I've seen him before but cannot make out  
Was it Penny's or Dunnes or somewhere about?  
I think he likes the way that I dress  
But it's not really him I want to impress.  
Each time our eyes meet, his face turns red**

**A stranger, an admirer, not a word has been said  
But there's something about him, what can it be  
It's doing my head in, come on... talk to me.  
I don't find you creepy; you're different to be fair  
Is it my legs my face, my smile or my hair?**

He If only I could tell you the truth about me  
Then you could understand about what I see  
Of what I wish and what my dreams would be  
To look like you: so feminine, she not he.  
To dress like you would be a dream come true  
Sexy silks and satins, black red and blue.

I know I am different that's why no one can know  
About my little secrets, high heels and bows.  
There might be others who dress up like me  
But none that I know of or none I can see.  
I can't understand it, but I love how it feels  
To look like a woman in nylons and heels.

She **I can see him looking, compelled and in awe  
Jaysus you'd swear he had lock jaw.  
Maybe I know him, his friend or his brother  
His sister, his aunt or even his mother.  
Maybe I should ask him, nice and polite  
To find the truth would be such a delight.**

I catch his eye, and give a friendly smile  
He returns the gesture, but it did take a while.  
My curiosity is killing me; I take the first step  
So sit down beside him, out of my depth.  
Waiting to hear what he has to say  
Make it witty or intelligent or relevant I pray.

Nothing happening so I cough and say "Hi,  
Have we met before or was it some other guy?"  
He turns and looks straight into my eyes  
No words, no expressions, just little sighs.  
Maybe I should get up and cut all ties  
No further words; not even goodbyes.

He I cannot believe that she did just that  
I don't even know her, no harm in a chat,  
I can't get the words out, no matter how I try  
Hopefully she'll think that I'm just a shy guy.

"We never have met by hook or by chance.  
I regret to say no previous romance."

She **"So why is it that I think we have met before,  
In Penny's or Dunnes or some other store?  
You seem so familiar why can't I recall  
The event or occasion - perhaps a pub-crawl?  
There is a connection, I know that is true  
Put me out of my misery before I turn blue!"**

He "If you want I will be as honest as I can be  
And tell you the time that we met accidentally.  
You may not remember because of my dress  
A bit too short, and my wig was in a mess.  
It was the week before Christmas, of that I'm sure  
My first time out dressed, nervous and insecure."

She **"Stop it there, can't understand a word  
Surely what you are saying is totally absurd.  
What do you mean you were wearing a dress?  
Are you a Transvestite, cross dresser or even TS?  
I don't remember us meeting, what shop was it in  
Principles, Marks and Sparks or even Superquinn?"**

He "Please don't talk so loud, people might hear  
And that is more than I could bear.  
No-one else knows except me and you,  
Not even my mother, not a clue.  
I thought you recognised me, don't ask me why,  
Because I will remember you till the day I die.

"The first woman I spoke to all dressed up like that  
You didn't look surprised, not an eyelid did you bat.  
'36C,' was all you could mutter,  
'Not one to be found with all the clutter,  
Black or Red, it does not matter.'  
I handed you mine as if on a platter.

"'Thank you, oh thank you,' you said in glee,  
'No problem,' I said, pretending to be she.  
But... that wasn't the last time that we did meet.  
Was in the hosiery shop just down the street?  
I bumped into you just inside the front door  
You dropped your shopping onto the shop floor."

She **"Yes I remember, I remember you now.  
I just thought that you were a silly old cow.  
With all the rush and the Christmas cheer,  
You weren't what I thought you were it would appear.  
I apologise for what I called you in that store,  
But you must have laughed when I called you a whore."**

He "Yes I was surprised, to be honest with you,  
Thought you had read me just out of the blue.  
I was glad when you left the shop in a rush,  
Cause everyone could see I was starting to blush.  
It was an eventful day, my first one out,  
No-one recognised me, it was great throughout!"

She **"Again I am sorry, I shouldn't have been so rude,  
I certainly didn't read you and know you're a dude.  
You looked quite well, as far as I can remember,  
Can I recommend a club of which I am a member?  
This is the number, and this is my name,  
Ask for Natalie and she will explain."**

He "I don't understand what club can this be  
Are you telling me there are more like me?  
I just don't believe it; I'm almost in shock,  
No longer the freak, the man in a frock.  
If you don't mind me asking, how do you know  
Of this special club - was it on a chat show?

She **"I can see that you are surprised by what you hear,  
But let me tell you, you've nothing to fear.  
There are thousand like you in this small country of ours  
Most you will never meet, not even on Mars.  
Go to the club and live out your dreams,  
And see what being feminine really means.**

"Now I am being called by the doc over there  
Another boob job and discussing skin care.  
Take the time to give Natalie a call,  
Enjoy the moments and have a ball!  
When we next meet you can call me Anne,  
Even though once, like you - I was a man."





Donna



Sandra

# A Girl Named Adam

by Adam

Sometimes even I get my own pronouns 'wrong'. No, really, I do. You would think it that is lowers my expectations that the rest of the world will get them right, and sometimes it does. That said, rationality can go out the window when confronted with someone who wilfully disregards your wishes and treats your gender identity as a 'phase'.

Maybe it is one. But then again, we all change so much in life, what isn't a phase to some degree? Many people don't practice the same career forever and others don't stay in the same relationship forever. So are you going to tell me that a marriage of fifteen years that breaks up was not a marriage, but a phase? Of course not. Why, then, is my decision to use male pronouns considered to be a phase by so many people?

I came out as FtM in the usual (if there even is a usual) way. I had a game plan, a little set of personal goals – change name, take hormones, have chest surgery. Then I replaced my game plan with a freak out and went back to hiding in skirts. I ended up with quite the collection. Sadly, I assigned the whole lot to the bin when I realised I was, in fact, gone way off course and in danger of starting to purchase things like Prada handbags.

So back I went to my set of goals. Goal One: The Name Change. This was accomplished with relative ease, thanks to the civil servants I dealt with. I believe I was exceptionally lucky in this, but I didn't bask in this luck, I was too busy stressing over unlikely eventualities and throwing up excuse after excuse not to complete the deed poll. I am ashamed to say it took me over six months. To sign a bit of paper. Maybe I should have taken that as a sign.

That accomplished, I moved on to Goal Two: Get Hormones. Again, I believe I was relatively lucky in my dealings with doctors, but I was still so busy angsty that I failed to notice. I got my script into my hand and that was when the trouble started. You see, I wanted to fill it, but first I needed to...

Well, by the end, the excuses were as far-fetched as waiting until they had a new coffee machine at work. Believe me, were that what I was waiting for I would most definitely still be sitting hopefully outside some pharmacy, script clutched in hand.

Instead, I started to ask myself some very serious questions. I made myself look at me in the mirror. The naked me, the one I hadn't been able to stand for years. And a strange thing happened, I wasn't repulsed. In fact, I found I was even admiring my butt, albeit envisaging it as a size or two smaller.

This unprecedented experience really gave me pause for thought. If what I saw in the mirror was no longer upsetting me, was it really sensible to change it? I decided it wasn't. But then, because the human brain loves its compartments, I thought 'But, does that mean I'm a man or a woman?' Oh no! I couldn't answer. The world must surely end. Oddly enough, it didn't. But a little insistent voice kept telling me that my name was Adam and that wasn't going to change any time soon. And I liked male pronouns.

So I stuck with them, letting myself be mainly androgynous and modelling my clothing and appearance on various androgynous male characters.

And then I saw a skirt I liked. And I found myself buying it and, even more shockingly, wearing it.

Recently, with the help of a borrowed corset, I rediscovered my breasts and greeted them like long-lost friends. But they didn't change my pronouns one little bit.

I identify as queer now. I don't feel female, I don't feel male and I don't feel like I really care. But the world never stops wanting me to. It's begging me to every time I use a public bathroom, every time I go into a clothes shop, every time I give my name on the telephone and get asked to repeat it six times.

Yes, it's Adam. Yes, it would be an odd name for a woman. Yes, I would love to go into it with you but now just doesn't seem the time.

And of course, my own speech necessitates a choice – am I using 'he' or 'she'? For me, the newly available Third Gender Pronouns are not something I feel comfortable with wearing.

So it would seem that for now, I am a girl called Adam (Mister if you must) and I am currently saving up for that aforementioned Prada handbag.



Nicole





Broden Giambrone



Donna





Ariel Silvera

## Unapologetic Subcultural Chattel

*by Ariel Silvera*

I don't mean to be a punk stereotype, but a small chain of events began with a night drinking beer by the canal. It was oddly warm for Dublin, and we were drinking for a friend's going away. It was the night I gave her a manual of good manners for young catholic ladies. A queer American anarchist woman, she appreciated the irony.

I found myself on my own, it was one of those awkward nights where you want to be surrounded by others but find yourself at a loss for conversation. This other American girl sat next to me and started talking. She'd been staying with a friend, and for some reason we got talking about comics. She pegged me as genderqueer right away, something nobody had done before despite the fact I presented quite obviously in some sort of genderfuck every day. "It was the flowery tights," she remembers, "combined with the combat shorts, it made you look more interesting than half the people there anyway". We bonded over our shared problems with Ireland. (me an Argentinian transplant, her a person of colour who got constant stares in the very white streets of Dublin), food, geeky interests, talking about exes, that sort of thing.

A few days later she left, but we stayed in touch through the 'net. In her travels she landed in Berlin and was staying at a queer women and trans squat. She knew of my ongoing issues with my identification, with figuring out what I wanted. How during the Lesbian Arts Festival, an elderly man referred to me as a 'young lady', the first time anyone ever did, and made my day.

Most of my friends had been supportive, even if most of them did not understand much about trans identities. She did, however, and invited me to join her for a week. "What about trying to live as a girl for a week? You'll be among queers, Ladyfest Berlin is on, and no-one knows you here."

And so it was I spent an incredible week, where my mind was exploding with new ideas, where things that had been gestating for months finally blossomed. I could be the kind of woman I wanted, in my own terms. I didn't have to do anything I didn't want to do. I could be free.

Back in Dublin, I exploded with confidence, and into a community of feminists and queer activists which embraced me with open arms. Fellow trans people of all genders supported me in all aspects of my transition. Cis friends, lovers and allies were open to learning, and teaching others. It was quite incredible.

It hasn't been a pain-free existence since then, but I do not believe in the idea that being trans is a personal tragedy. If anything, suffering related to my being trans has only been due to the bigotry and ignorance of others, not because of anything inherently horrible about who I am. I had the advantage of being an educated person with understanding family and friends. It was luck. It shouldn't be luck. We must build communities that support everyone.

# Leo the Boy Wonder

by L. F. / Sochi, Russia

My name is Leo, but my family call me Leonid. I do not like this name. They could never see the beauty in the way I shorten my birth name. There is a wondrous androgyny to the three letters that compose my chosen name. It makes me think of youth, vibrancy, boyish energy. I am Leo, the boy. In Russia, gay boys are called Pedik, which translates as “someone who takes it up the ass”. We are also sometimes known as doves, but they have never seen the obvious beauty of these birds.


We are beautiful, we are free. That is my dream. But my true dream is to wake up one fine morning, and between my thighs there will be a penis. I will touch my breasts, and they will be flat. I will be what my mind’s eye reflects back to me. The Russian teacher will not be able to tell my mother that I can’t write my essays from a boy’s perspective. The boys at my school will not be able to look upon me and tell me that I am not a “real boy”, like they are. It will all change.

When I visited Ireland last summer, I saw a statue of Oscar Wilde. It was funny, until that moment I did not actually know he was Irish. I had always assumed he was English. His posture was elegant and carefree, as if nothing had ever troubled his queer spirit. From looking at his cheeky grin, you could forget that he went to prison for his sexuality. Wilde once wrote: “My existence is a scandal. But I do not think I should be charged with creating a scandal by continuing to live: though I am conscious that I do so”. I that like we had a lot in common. My parents will never know the magical moment I had on that glorious evening.

I do not like the term “transgender”, but it is only because it is not enough. I cannot summon a word that would adequately describe my inner torment. Perhaps there is a word in some other language, but not in Russian or my adopted English. It has not been invented yet. Call me queer, call me gay, call me LGBT, call me whatever, but don’t call me a girl. I am Leo, the boy wonder.



Sean



I've never worn a metaphorical mask, yet somehow  
I kept acting like totally different people  
for different parts of my life.

*Anon*

## Breaking the Binary

*by Sam*

Touching the surface,  
Realising possibilities,  
Who am I?  
The girl I was brought up to be?  
The guy I wish I was?  
Or maybe something in the middle.

Coming out,  
As bi, as easy as a beach-day in summer  
As gay, just some light work to be whole  
As trans\*, impossible

My parents, don't believe it possible  
A tomboy who played male roles  
Not someone trapped in a cage  
But I can't get out of this mind-frame  
Wishing I was someone else

I wish I was born the person I will work to become  
But becoming him may strip away everything  
I live each day as two people  
Trying to make them combine  
Trying to make myself whole

I want to be seen as  
Sam, Samwise, Sammy  
Some people see it  
They give in to my wishes  
And obey my request

Few get my label  
FTM, Genderqueer  
They can't comprehend,  
The struggle inside  
The battle of the male and female  
That rages like a storm

Mostly, male wins  
The visible female doesn't rule my body  
But merely holds it for the man I am when  
I put myself through the stress of binding, of passing,  
Of life.



# The Cape

The cape has a trans flag representing our community, and also has a fish and an 'I'. The fish stands for IndividualiTy's logo and the 'I' stands for IndividualiTy Person, our Mascot. Zie represents our ability to be what ever we want to be, whether it's male, female, anything in-between or even a super hero! Indi'person's power is to be theirself and, of course, fly because he has a cape :)

*Andy*

## The Badges & Wallet

Rainbow Dash's cutie mark represents 'My little Pony: Friendship Is Magic', and the Brony Community. The Brony community is a sub-culture of people who like ponies, and the magic of friendship. Our motto is "Love and Tolerate", and we live by those words.

My wallet represents anime, and the anime community. Fans of anime and other Japanese arts are usually really nice and loving people. When I'm at an anime convention, I always feel accepted no matter what I do. If the whole world was full of these people, the world would be full of peace and love.

*Chris*

## The Sunglasses

My sunglasses are the only constant in the way I look. I wear them everywhere.

*Aidan/Nadia*

## The Moustache

The moustache is respect. No joke. I pass better with it. People think I'm older than I am. And they respect me. They look at me like I deserve to be looked at - because the moustache is awesome.

*James H*

## The Mask

It's visible but invisible at the same time.

*James M*

## The Ring

The ring to me is sentimental. It reminds me of all my memories. The positive memories that I associate with my ring all overlap the rest of my memories.

*Raz*

## The Poi

Every piece of ourselves adds colour. My contribution, the wobbly arms made of poi represent the first time I didn't suppress my inner desires to fit in with society's expectations.

For the first time, I could carry something rainbow coloured, do something graceful, express my inner self without fear of any reprisal. Because of the courage and confidence they gave me, I will always be thankful for my stripey, rice filled, colourful socks.

*Allie*



Members of BeLonGTo's IndividualiTy group discuss their contributions to the creation of 'Untitled'.

## Be Yourself, Be Proud

*by Raz*

They say it is “just a phase”,  
But it is not.  
They said I am just a kid,  
But I am not.  
They said to be more feminine,  
But I can not.

They think it is a phase,  
But it is not.  
I may be young,  
But I am not “just a kid”.  
It is not “just a phase”,  
I could try to change,  
But that would be a lie to myself.

This is my life,  
I am who I am.  
And I am proud.

## The Cloak

*Anonymous*

A long time ago  
when people lived in harmony,  
a happy peaceful existence  
free from worries.

But in the woods  
lived an outsider.  
A monster of their own creation,  
A creepy dark shape.

They ran from it.  
They hurt it.

But under its black cloak  
It was beautiful.

## Bothering God

*by Etchers*

I was always told that the wings of angels were easily reached.  
I had a fine way there if I was a good girl.  
Said my prayers and fed myself my manners,  
Spoke when I was spoken to and wore my sparkles modest.

I was told that the heavens were golden.  
Full of harp-playing ladies and lutes a plenty.  
Delicious feasts of carcass and the brownest roots.  
But now that I’m older and wiser and manlier,  
I decided to tell Jesus the Christ where he could stick it.  
If he’s good at it maybe more than once.

Because that shiny place in the sky is no place for me.  
No place for the madness I bring with the silk of my hands.  
The touch on the skin and the sheer shock of my shining.

I am the architect of words and stories.  
Half-told lies on a Saturday night rolled up in the narcotics of brilliance.  
I can be perfect; I can be more than just nice.  
I can make a sunrise flow and flip over on its back.  
I am not saying that I am God, I am just saying that I am fine,  
Fine the way I am.

Fine as a man with a vagina and I am taking names and cashing checks.  
A wrecking ball crashing and making a mess.

I will embrace it with open arms because I feel like it.  
Right now, I feel like I could do anything.  
Right now, I feel free and just and better than good.

Good is mediocre, good is for losers.  
I have found peace in a land where peace is a commodity,  
A thing to be bargained for.

I can feel the blood flowing through my arms.  
The chill of Winter and the heat of Summer.

I will breathe now that I can do so.  
And when I can not, you’ll have a fight on your hands God,  
When I have to face you.

# Mirror Moment

by Alice

I looked around suspiciously, making sure no-one could see me, then darted into my room and locked the door. I was alone in the house, apart from my cat, but you could never be too cautious. I always worried my cat would somehow tell people if she saw me, anyway.

I made sure my blinds were closed all the way, then reached into the very back of my wardrobe. I pulled out a pink and flowery skirt, a bright yellow top, and a push-up bra. I stared at the ground, blushing in shame. I put on the stereotypically girly clothes along with some make-up, and stared at myself in the mirror.

“You’re doing this all wrong,” I told myself, “You’re cross-cross-dressing. How does that even work?” I wasn’t sure why I felt so embarrassed and ashamed for wearing clothes that I was supposed to wear, that I’d be expected to wear. It was probably because I wasn’t really a girl. But nobody else knew that. And if I was really a trans-boy, like I thought I was, surely I wouldn’t like wearing girls’ clothes? I would never, ever go out in public like this, though. The humiliation would be too much to bear. Much as I liked looking pretty in the privacy of my room, I wouldn’t feel normal wearing these clothes for anything other than playing dress-up.

But... I’d look normal. I’d seem normal. It wasn’t like anyone, if they saw me like this, would stare or be shocked or say I was crazy, or anything that might normally happen to cross-dressers. This was cross-dressing, right? ‘Cause I was a guy. Even though I was a girl in everyone else’s eyes, and actually made quite a pretty girl, I had to admit. “I would totally date myself,” I thought, as I continued gazing into the mirror, “Girl-me, that is.”

Even though I was technically “normal-dressing”, I got quite a thrill from dressing as a girl. It wasn’t just that I looked nice, though that was part of it, it was also because it felt so strange and different. I kinda got a buzz from how off-limits and forbidden it felt. Despite knowing that it really wasn’t, at all.

After about ten more minutes in girl-clothes, it started seeming less fun and exciting, and more sickening and wrong. This always happened if I stayed cross-dressed for too long; I’d start being reminded of all the “she” and “her” and “good girl” used in reference to me all the time, and have to go back to being boy-me in order to feel better. It was always fun to play with some femininity once in a while, but then I’d start feeling trapped in the role and have to get out of it before the curse of people thinking I was a girl ate me alive from inside my mind.

When I was changed back into my usual clothes, I looked in the mirror briefly, and sighed in relief. This felt so much more normal; no fear, no guilt, no shame, no confusion. I was just a boy, and I could pretend it was no more complicated than that.







Louise Hannon

## Everyday

*by Louise Hannon*

I got up this morning and I thought of you both. This happens every day. Only the four of us will know what these words mean.

You cried at six weeks. I doubled your feed. You slept soundly. You sat in the little white bath by the living room fire. I took your photograph. You looked so like your oldest son. The same photograph I took. He must be eight now? Time has blurred the date.

You had a bumble bee suit at six months. Glen was a pup. You were sitting in the garden seat at the front door.

In my arms you took a convulsion. Dr Bobby rushed to help. He cut off your clothes. He put you in a tepid bath. We had to watch your temperature very carefully. You were eighteen months old.

We took you to hospital... the doctor looked down your throat with a wooden spatula. He broke it in two and threw it in the bin. Every time we bought you a lollipop, you instinctively did the same thing.

"Baby oranges mammy," and you loved them. Clemantines in season. You loved the wrestling on TV. You shouted at the screen just like your grandfather that you never knew did. You had an awful temper at times.

Bunty arrived in a box at the side of the road.  
The animal shelter was to be contacted... it never happened

A year later, Glen arrived "the ball dog". He had four brothers. I drowned the four. We kept him. He was a lucky dog.

You were the star of the school play. You were able to give the teachers "cheek" and did it in such a way that you always got away with it.

How come you let that little lad bully you at school? He was only up to your shoulder. We complained, the headmaster wasn't terribly helpful. His mother and father were both good teachers.

*(contd)*

We changed your school and we fought hard to get your baby brother into the same school. The school capitulated. They had breached their own rules. We went on holiday and Johnny Walker the comedian got you on stage. “What school do you go to?” You told him in the middle of all this, “I don’t know”.

On a British airways flight from Spain, you sat beside the captain, kept him in craic and pushed the button to let down the landing wheels before returning to your seat, while your little brother slept under a blanket in the front seat. We were worried you would annoy the captain.

I took you to see a customer’s dog that had pups. You had to have one and Honey arrived two weeks later. When she died seven years later on the operating table in the vet’s, you cried for four days solid and couldn’t go to school. You were very soft-hearted at times.

You played rugby and your opposite number had to come off. I heard him complaining to his coach that you had “tweaked” the muscle in his shoulder in the scrum. “It wasn’t fair Sir, he hurt me...” I said nothing. I just smiled.

We raised funds for you to go with the school team on a tour abroad. You hurt your neck in training. You were sent to Manchester for an MRI scan. Your playing days were over, but you did chance the wing at college when players were short.

You both got your degrees. I was not around.

You both got married. I was not around.  
You both have more children. I am not around.

I’ve made mistakes on this journey and had I to do it again I’d do it differently, but the outcome would be exactly the same. I doubt I’d still be alive otherwise. The expression “you only hurt the ones you love” is so very true. Thank you to everyone who has helped me on this difficult journey to live a life that I now so thoroughly enjoy.

I have your photographs on my sideboard at graduation. I’m so proud of you.

## To my Daughter Jaimee

*by Louise Griffith*

Thank you, Jaimee,

For your courage.

For your beauty.

For educating me.

For being true to yourself.

For loving me though at times I said and did the wrong things.

For making me stronger.

For being my beautiful daughter.

Love you,

Mam xxx

## Young Mick!

*by Mick Casey*

Mick is so innocent but life made him tough

Like dynamite he could blow any time

Hard to trust anybody – just living in silence

He’s a stranger to people

Was a secret, denied for so long

Kept in the dark, but he’s alive

Mick is everything I’m not – Mick is me!



Panti



Rory O'Neill



# Journey so far

by Ben Power

I knew from a very early age there was something different about me. I wasn't interested in playing the games the other little girls played or wearing the kind of clothes they wore. I preferred to be with the boys climbing trees or kicking a ball. When we played pretend games I was always a male character much to the chagrin of my playmates. As I got older I increasingly rejected skirts and dresses and begged my mother to let me have my hair cut short. It was cut shorter, but never quite to the extent I wanted, to me it always looked girly... like someone else's hair that had been transplanted onto my head.

When puberty hit my mind disassociated itself from my appearance completely! I started unconsciously to hunch my shoulders to hide my swelling chest and wore baseball caps and football jerseys at every opportunity. It gave me a real thrill to be 'mistaken' for a boy. I started comfort eating and doubled my weight by the time I was 26. At 21 I moved to London for college and 3 years later I joined a Dungeons and Dragons group and met someone who has since become one of my closest friends. When she told me six months or so later that she was transgender and actually a "he" I didn't realise immediately the significance of the event. As I watched him struggle with his transition I slowly began to realise how much I identified with his stories of feeling "wrong". I tried to shut it out. I threw away all my masculine clothes and starts shopping in female departments but within a year I became so depressed that I knew I had to do something or die. I decided to investigate that side of myself that I had tried so hard to suppress.

In May 2007 I wandered into The Other Place café and resource centre in Cork and told the guy in there that I thought I might be transgender. He told me about the Trans group that met there on the first Wednesday of every month. I attended their June meeting and was amazed to see how many people were there. Over the next few months I cut my hair, bought men's clothes again and ordered some chest binders and a packer from internet sites I found while researching.

The first time I looked in the mirror after struggling my way into my new binder was a wonderful experience. For the first time in 13 years I was able to look at my reflection and genuinely smile. It was an amazing feeling. While the friends I came out to in that time were amazingly supportive, the family story was a little bit different. My mother was quite hostile to the idea and is still of the opinion that I was "brainwashed" by the gay community. The loss of my relationship with her is still deeply upsetting to me but I am thankful for the good friends I have around me, both old and new.

In January 2008 I attended a weekend in Dungarvan hosted by TENI for the country's transgender community and their partners. It was the first time I had been exclusively called Ben and referred to as male and I had never felt so comfortable in a group of strangers. It confirmed for me that I was at last on

the right track. I went to see a GP and started counselling sessions.

I started testosterone therapy in December 2009 and I have never looked back. Although coming out and making the transition at work was difficult and ultimately contributed to my decision to leave my job, I now have hope when I look towards the future. I am now a volunteer member of staff at The Other Place and a co-facilitator of the same Trans group that I walked into 5 years ago with all my questions. In October 2011 I also joined the TENI Board of Directors. For the first time, the work I do has some meaning to me and there is much I look forward to.

I look forward to a time after chest surgery when I can go shirtless on the beach with all the other guys and to finding someone I can share my life with. I look forward to getting an accurate birth certificate when the Irish government brings in legal recognition at last. Most of all though, I look forward to the day when my family can finally accept me for the person I am and we can rebuild our relationship. I now have a lot of hope for the future, and I want to be around to see it happen!



Ben Power

## Frilly Things

*by Petra*

I love to dress in frilly things  
I've no idea why  
I try to fight but soon give up  
For fear my heart will die

Sometimes I wake and all alone  
I crave that soft-soft feel  
Dressing like the girl I miss  
Afraid to make her real

At other times I crave reform  
I only dress like men  
Casting frills to burning flames  
I spend a fortune buying again

In truth, I have no choice you know  
Not now at any rate  
Who knows what dice the gods will throw  
Who knows our passion's fate

Let Thinking Knave stray where he will  
Seeking truths to understand  
No matter what my thoughts distil  
My heart needs not comprehend

So, as I learn this sacred dance  
And all my parts draw near  
I learn to love you as you are  
And learn to live - embracing fear

I love to dress in frilly things  
I've no idea why  
But death's embrace gives me wings  
To let my passion fly!

## A Transgendered Woman in Waterford City

*by Kyra Brady*

I realised at the age of 8 that I was a woman inside. I hid my secret well but deep inside I knew I had to change my outer skin by transitioning. So in 2004 I gathered all of my courage and my life savings and had my full transition gender re-alignment surgery and became fully the woman I always was. It was hard at first as I was the first Male to Female transition ever in Waterford.

I had never married but my family - my Mum - couldn't and didn't want to understand. They disowned me. I was penniless and had no friends, no family and was homeless. But with help, I am learning how to improve myself. I have received support from many sources: the Health Service Executive (with counselling); my Gynaecologist Dr John Bermingham; my GP Dr Liam MacCann; my friends in SOUTH (The South Eastern branch of LGBT - of which I am a committee member); Irene and Dennis Noonan who took me in when I had nowhere to go; Mr Joe Kelly, a local Sinn Féin Councillor and a true friend to me, who got me my house. Above all, I've been supported by my true friends in TENI and TranSE - Vanessa, Jane, Sandra and Lucy in particular; and also with my more feminine appearance due to my hormones.

Yes, Waterford now knows I am here, also knows that Transgendered people exist and have accepted me for the woman that I am. Most of all I can look at myself in the mirror and know that I have been honest and true to myself and to society and hopefully made a difference for the acceptance of other trans people in Waterford following after me.

## A Rose

*by Kyra Brady*

My seed was planted by god,  
I was a woman inside,  
I grew and grew fed by life  
and in 2004 this rose bloomed  
and at last felt the warmth of the sun,  
the wind in my face and yes it's good for this woman  
to be alive just like the rose that bloomed.



Kyra Brady



Zoë

## Where to From Here (My journey to becoming a Woman)

*by Zoë*

My childhood wasn't happy. Most of it was spend confused, angry and upset. I became aware of my gender at a young age and it hurt me so much realising that I was the wrong gender.

I used to cry myself to sleep thinking about it and some nights even prayed to God to turn me into the girl I was meant to be.

A few years later in my teens, I still thought I was never going to be a female until I saw this magazine with a story about a young M to F Trans person speaking about her experiences with school, family and friends. She opened my eyes to the possibility of changing my gender. Hearing how much positivity was in her life inspired me to tell someone, but that was easier said than done.

I was cross dressing most of the time, when I felt I wasn't going to be seen. I was a bit embarrassed and ashamed even though I shouldn't have been. I became a bit unstable in my late teens, and resorted to drugs and alcohol to keep my feelings suppressed. I became suicidal. That was a turning point for me.

When I realised that my family had a idea of what was wrong, I picked up the courage and tried to explain what was I was going through. My mum took it surprising well – she wasn't over the moon about it (like I was!), but she accepted it and that was the most important thing for me. Those were my first baby steps towards becoming a woman.

When I thought it couldn't get any better, I found out there was a local LGBT centre called Outcomers. I went to them for the first time -a bit nervous and shy and soon found a place where I was me. I met with the group who were friendly and a really nice bunch of people. I told them about me, they give me really helpful information about being transgender. I then realised that my childhood dreams were coming true.

I am one year in to my transition and feeling great about my life, I now have a goal and I am not going to stop till I achieve it.





Cat McIlroy for *Transgender Ireland* by Alison McDonnell



Ariel Silvera for *Transgender Ireland* by Alison McDonnell



Broden Giambrone for *Transgender Ireland* by Alison McDonnell



Deirdre O'Byrne for *Transgender Ireland* by Alison McDonnell

# I Want This Walk To Never End

by Deirdre O'Byrne

I didn't know I was female until age 39. At that age, in spite of having done a tonne of therapy, my mental state had been only deteriorating. I had been cross-dressing for almost 20 years, and had been terribly conflicted about it throughout that time. Finally, having had enough, I started socialising on the transgender scene in Dublin. Naturally, I was prepared to identify myself as a transvestite - though I was hoping that I might find a cure, or at least a coping mechanism, for my need to crossdress. What I wasn't prepared for was meeting transgender women at all stages of transition, and realising that I identified with them far more than with transvestites. It was a tortuous, frightening, scary, yet also hugely rewarding couple of months. Thus started my journey of acknowledging my true nature.

One of the most significant of many significant events in that journey was the day I took my first steps out in public as a female. Now that is a scary experience! I was well aware that if my presentation wasn't perfect, I was going to be seen as a "man in a dress", with all the dangers associated with that. Despite the fear, it was something I had to do - I simply had to have this experience, as it was a necessary part of my gender exploration.

I was in the Canal Street area of Manchester - a very transgender-friendly place - and I had rented some self-catering accommodation. I got dressed (*dress down - don't attract attention!*), put on my makeup (*keep it simple*), and I went to the door of the accommodation. I was so scared I could only open the door a crack. Then fear got the better of me, and I closed the door. Thus started a long period of 20 or 30 minutes of opening and closing the door, of using one eye to see if I could see anyone in the corridor, and of listening out for sounds, until eventually I was on the other side of the door and closing it behind me.

Maybe 2 hours later, after having a meal out, after drinking quite a bit to calm my nerves, and after my very scary first ever foray into the women's toilets, I found myself walking up the street, feeling a freedom and a sense of being alive that I had never felt before. It was the first time I had ever walked up the street. I said to myself - "I want this walk to never end". A little voice in the back of my head went, "you know what - it never will". I knew what that voice was telling me - that I was going to transition - and I broke down there and then on the street.

People say that I want to be a woman, that I decided to change my gender. I want no such thing! For me, being a woman means being transgender, and I certainly don't want to be transgender. Also, who would want the crap that women have to put up with? No - I didn't change my gender - I discovered my

gender. I discovered why I found it so very difficult to be male, I discovered why my mental state had been constantly deteriorating all my adult life, and I also discovered that for all the difficulties of being a transgender woman, it was still easier than pretending to be male.

The tortuous couple of months of a journey into realising my true nature was only the start. I then realised what I had to do with that information! I had to, in some ways, re-start my life. I had to learn how to dress myself. I had to learn hair care. I had to learn all the thousands of lessons that girls and women learn throughout their lives, and I had to learn fast. And, I had to prostrate myself in front of the medical profession, seeking treatment for my condition.

I also had to come out to family and friends. And, worse, I had to make sure I could make a living as a transgender woman. If I lost friends, I could make new ones. If I lost family, I'd get over it. But if I couldn't make a living?

Coming out didn't start too well. The first two friends I came out to - people I thought were very open-minded and accepting - were the only two friends who have pretty much rejected me. So I put on hold coming out to friends, and chose the next coming out: to my father. I wasn't looking forward to it.

It was a bit of a bus journey for me to get to the pub in which I was to meet him. On the bus, I started apologising to him in my head. I was going to meet him and basically ruin his day, if not more. The good news is that I was already very much happier in myself, and I was wearing that happiness in the fact that I had lost an absolute ton of extra weight. So at least I could point to that as evidence that my gender identity was real.

The conversation went something like this:

"Dad, I'm transgender."

"I see." (*Eh? He mustn't have heard or understood me.*)

"I've been socialising as a female on the transgender scene in Dublin for the past few months."

"Uh huh." (*What?! OK - he doesn't understand the gravity of what I'm saying.*)

"One of the things I've discovered about myself in this is that I have a sexual interest in men."

"OK." (*Um - this isn't in the script - you are supposed to be roaring and shouting at me by now! What the hell is going on?! Lookit - this is really really really big news for me! Right - I'm going to bring out the big guns - I'm going to let you have it and get the reaction I came here for.*)

"I've applied to Loughlinstown Hospital for a sex change."

"I hope you get it."

(contd)



On the bus home, I realised that I hadn't ruined his day - if anything, he had ruined mine! I had come for a fight, and I left with a feeling of being loved and accepted that I didn't think was possible.

Since then, he explained to me that he had seen how much happier I was, and had seen how much weight I had lost, so he was glad to learn the cause. Recently, when things with the medical profession in Loughlinstown hospital got hairy, I asked him to join me in the clinic, which he did. He has met many of my transgender friends, has been to some transgender events with me, and was more than happy to accept an invitation to be photographed with me for this publication.

His reaction has been typical of the reaction of my family members. Even my extended family have welcomed me with open arms. Unfortunately, I am the only transgender person I know who is able to say that about their family.

My work hasn't, as far as I can tell, been affected beyond what it would have been affected in this economy anyway. All told, I've had a good transition. There've been some hiccups, but I'm here, I'm more alive than I've ever been, I'm me, and I'm happy.

Being a transgender person has its moments, both good and bad. One evening, I was on the DART, heading into town. I was only a few months on HRT, and I was still quite nervous about my presentation. Anyway, I was sitting by the aisle, with a woman sitting beside me beside the window. On the two seats facing us there were two other women. Those three women obviously knew each other, as they were chatting away. Next thing, as the train was stopped at a station, the woman beside me said, "I can't tell if that is a man or a woman!" I was dumbstruck! Usually, when someone wants to out you, to do the point-and-stare thing, they whisper, drawing their friends in close, so that the trans person doesn't hear them. But she said it out loud, so that everyone in the immediate vicinity could hear her. Slowly, nervously, I turned to look at her. I was delighted, amused, and above all relieved to see that she was pointing out the window at an androgynous-looking person on the platform outside - she wasn't talking about me at all!

Finally, I just want to say to the clerk at the credit union - it's cool. When I changed my name legally by deed poll, I had to ensure that my name was changed with everyone I do business with. One of the institutions I had to approach was the Credit Union. I hadn't used the Credit Union account in years, and my account was still in a town I wasn't living in anymore. I researched what I needed to do - I needed to approach my local credit union, with a recent bill, photo identification, a copy of my deed poll, and I had to fill out some forms. Unfortunately, the only photo ID I had was my male passport, which I still hadn't changed over. And, since I was now living happily as a female, there was no way I was going to "switch back" to male just to change my name at the

Credit Union. In any case, since I was changing my name from a male name to a female one, it was going to be pretty clear to the clerk that I was transgender. So, this was going to be interesting - the female me using the male me's passport as photo identification.

So, I handed her my paperwork, the recent bill, a copy of my deed poll, and my passport. I made sure to arrange the paperwork so that she read the deed poll before getting to my passport. I explained to her that I was moving my account, "and, just to make things a bit more interesting, I'm also changing my name". She looked at the paperwork. She gave my deed poll a good read, so I expected that she had now figured out that I'm trans and so she shouldn't be surprised by the passport. Then she opened my passport. She went to the photo page, looked at the photo, looked at me, looked back at the photo, and said, "Who is this - your husband?"



Deirdre O'Byrne

# What Father Wouldn't Be Proud?

by Bernard O'Byrne

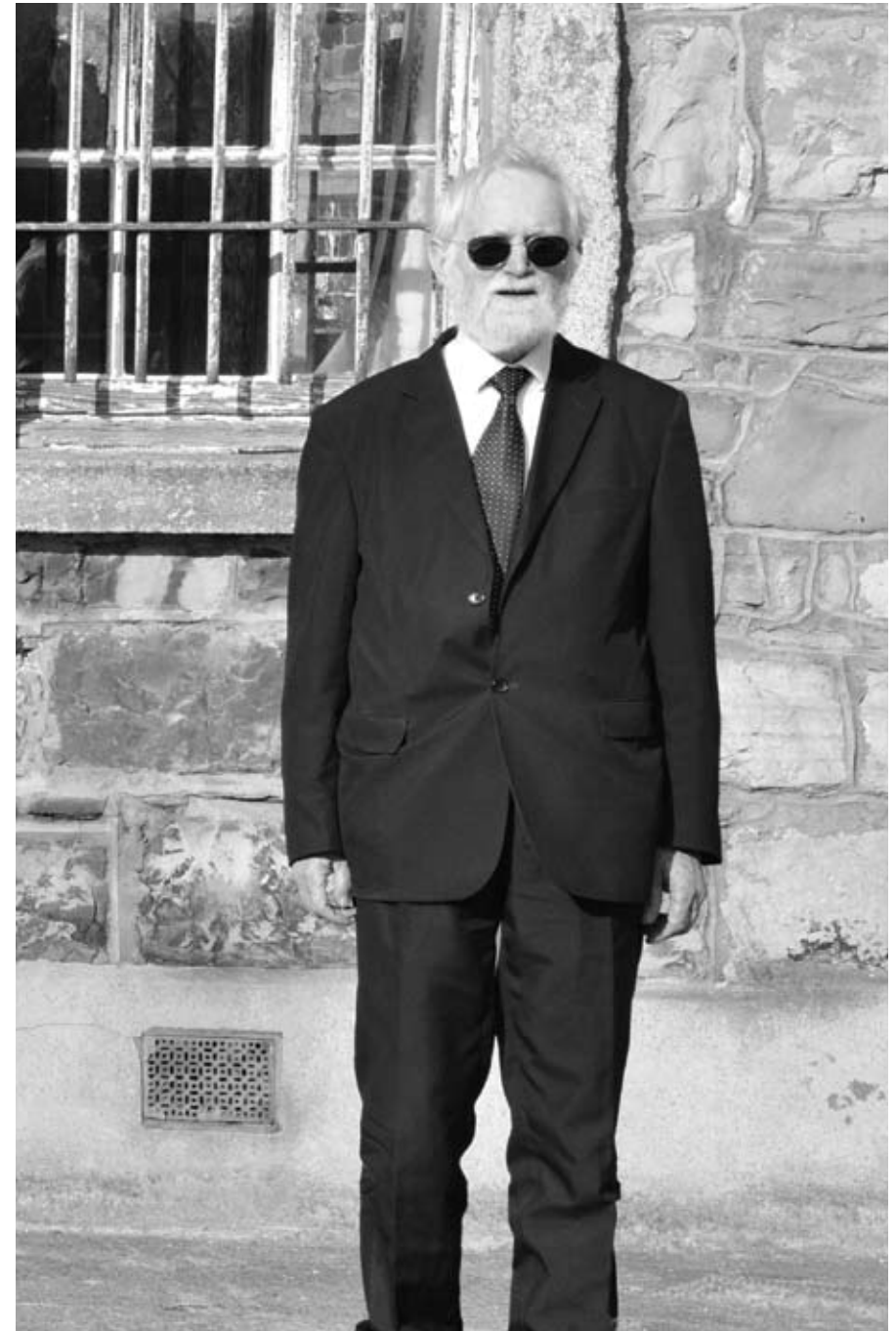
I am immensely proud of all my family. Sure, each has caused me worry, anguish, even trauma at times, but they are such wonderful special people. Take my oldest son. Actually you can't anymore because... but I'll come to that later. Anyway, he had a brilliant mind, robust good health, exemplary integrity, a strong moral sense, and was successful - what father wouldn't be proud. But there was something not quite right.

In retrospect, the first inkling I got of his problem was when he was about thirteen. He told me he was wondering whether or not he was gay, and wanted my reaction. I can't remember exactly what I said, but I can clearly remember my reactions. Of course I was shocked. The fact that he brought up the subject meant that he was deadly serious. Images went through my mind of him suffering derision and discrimination throughout his life as a result of his sexual orientation, of him lying in a pool of blood or even dead as a result of 'gay bashing'. However I remembered my own youth, and the doubts I had about my own sexuality during my puberty, and hoped that this was what was going on. I remember advising him not to make any firm decision until he was older. For a while afterwards I thought back over his life, and watched him more closely, looking for signs of homosexuality. I saw nothing, and soon forgot about the incident.

He built a successful life for himself. However there were a couple of things I worried about. In spite of all his obvious talents and pleasant personality he lacked self-confidence. He was an excellent driver, but repeatedly failed his driving test. He shied away from any managerial responsibility at work. But most important, he seemed incapable of forming any intimate relationship.

Then he asked to meet me - obviously for something important. He was nervous, but with an underlying confidence and contentment I had rarely seen in him. He beat about the bush a lot, but eventually told me that he was transgender. Knowing nothing about the condition, I was somewhat confused, but a lot of things fell into place. All her life she had been living an unconscious lie. Although I still saw her as my eldest son (and was sorry to lose him) it was obvious that what she was saying was true. My confusion would have to wait. We had a long chat, and I left that meeting still confused, but hopeful (and reasonably sure) that she could now blossom in a way that he never could. Of course I worried about discrimination and about the transition, but knew that these problems were temporary.

I now have a second daughter. She is, in one sense, just starting her life. She is more confident, self-assured and content than I have ever known her. She is frustrated that she has not instantly transformed into someone with a consistent background. That will never be. Deirdre, you are just starting on a completely new phase of your life. Enjoy the inner freedom your integrity has won for you. Give yourself and the world time to adjust. I love you. Dad.

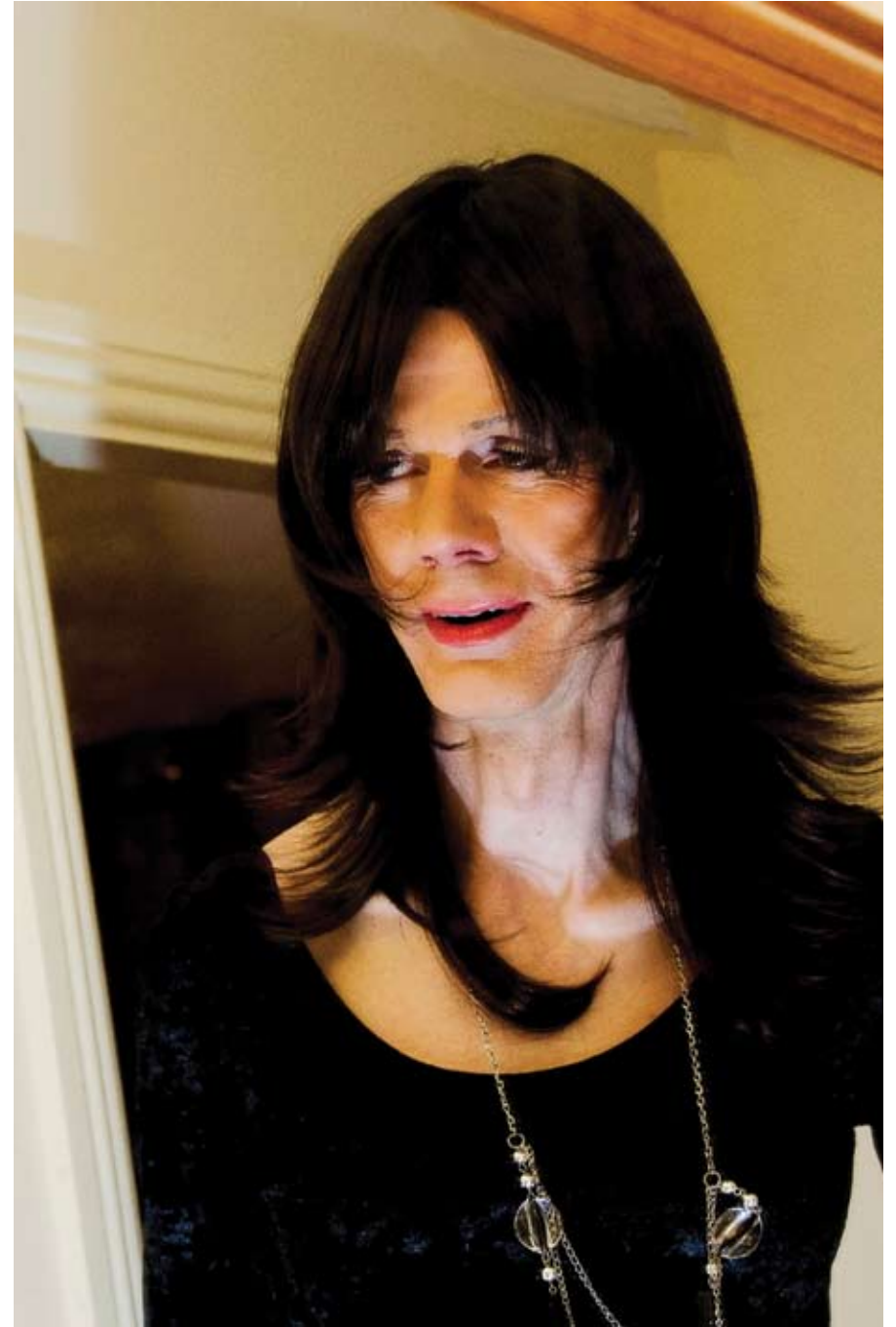


Bernard O'Byrne





Beth Goode



Lisa





Jane

## It's a Funny Little Life

*by Jane*

Life can be a bit funny at times, well not ha ha funny. When you think things are going well and you're feeling some way happy, bang! Your little bubble is burst, and your world is turned upside down. Well that's the way my life is at the moment.

It was hard enough having to start all over, six years ago. I had built a lovely big house for my family and then I ended up almost homeless. I'm not feeling sorry for myself, or sorry that I built the house, but it just shows how life can go.

When I started building my new house over a year ago, I was happy thinking of what way it would be like when it was finished. Little did I know the way things were going to turn out. Well, that's life. I don't think I will get the chance to see it finished but hey what the hell, up and on from here on in. I hope it can't get any worse. Oh hell, I don't think I should have said that.

But I had to leave, life was made too hard for me to stay. After all the work that went into building the house, money as well. But I think and now know that peace of mind is more important than where you live, or the house you live in. If you can't sleep at night because of a threat made by someone, and worry about every noise you hear, then I think it's time to go – and that's what I did. It was hard. No place to live, no money to rent somewhere to live. My friends down in Waterford helped me out as best they could, let me stay a few nights. They were very good to me and we are still friends, very good friends. That's where the support group came in to play. It's there I met and got to be friends with everyone and they were happy to help me out.

But the big thing for me was my kids. I was going to miss them so much. I was never too far away from them, never. I was always there for them. It's going to be hard, I know. Looking back on the past five years I think it was just survival, not living. The house not finished, no insulation, no proper heating made it hard living and another hard winter is on the way.

But things might be looking up. I'm going to look at a house by the sea. It's lovely the view from the kitchen and upstairs the bedroom is to die for. It's overlooking the sea and you can see the Hook Lighthouse as well. Oh, what a view. Looking back over all the bad things that I went through are now in the past, and over all the bad things that made me leave my home and kids.

I'm living in a lovely place, I have lots of good friends, I got work part time. I also started on a Back to Education course. It runs for two years. I'm doing Art, Craft and Design, and I love it. I also paint at home and I might say I'm not too bad at it. I've sold four already.

So out of a very bad time and all the bad things that happened, came a lot of very good things. That's why I say it's a funny little life.

## Meditation For An Uncertain Moment

*by Annabelle*

The world is what it is. There is much in it that is beautiful and much that is painful to me. But it is what it is, and I am powerless to change it.

I am what I am. There is much in my nature I am fond of and much that I must regret. But I am what I am—and though some may say that I have the power to change myself, they have no notion of what I might wish to change.

There is one facet of my nature that is a mystery to all others. It causes me no pain, but is on the contrary the source of my delight. It is my jewel, the radiance of my soul—and though others may deride it as tarnished and debased, it remains a mystery to them.

Then I will cast my shadow on the land like all others who have passed through this world. I will turn my face to the sun and rain, and I will follow my road wherever it may lead me. I will suffer my little setbacks, and I will savour my little victories. I will reach out for much, I will cling to much; some things I will lose and lament.

But I will turn my face to the sun and rain, and when my road is done, I will look back upon it and declare with gratitude,

“Veni, vidi, vixi!”  
 (“I came, I saw, I lived!”)

## The Point of Acceptance

*by Deirdra*

Childhood, a fun-filled experience? For the most part, yes. As a child, I learned many a lesson. My younger years were difficult, but nothing to complain about. I've learnt the hard way and by doing. I know you shouldn't run straight out onto a busy road without looking first. A lesson in common sense learnt when I ran head first into the side of a moving car and fell flat on my own ass. Funny when I think about it now.

Other things I've had to figure out over time. For instance, I've always known I should have been a girl but I never had that experience of growing up and experiencing life as a female. I was born a boy and with limited information and exposure to the real world, I knew of no other alternative. I saw very little of my parents growing up and I couldn't speak of my feelings with my older siblings. The large age gap didn't help matters either, so I endured a slow learning process towards self discovery.

I had some difficulty in school, feeling like an outsider, often hanging around with the girls playing basketball and so on. When I finally began secondary school, it became a nightmare. I went to an all-male school and that's when I really began to feel at odds with myself. I had a really good grasp of my sense of self, but I couldn't understand why I felt so differently from everyone else. All my classmates seemed to be coming into their own, while I struggled to find my footing. During my time there, I succumbed to bullying. I put on a lot of weight. The experience of not fully understanding myself thickened my skin, but it's not an experience I'd like to repeat.

By the time I reached College, I placed very little trust in others and repressed who I was. On occasion, I could drop my guard, but it took a lot of courage to do so. I became very depressed, abusing drugs and always keeping others at arm's length, (which I still do sometimes). However, with the help of the college counsellor, I began to find comfort in myself. I began to let go of all the feelings of shame and guilt that had grown over the years. It wasn't until I neared the end of my college education at the young age of 25, that I finally accepted me, Deirdra. It was an emotional few weeks as I was finally getting to grips with my true feelings. Only then did I slowly begin to drop my guard even lower and make some positive changes in my life.

To reach the point of accepting myself took years of introspection and thought: I finally realised that I just can't live my life as a male. I'm not bitter and angry anymore, but have thought how differently life might have been 'if only'. I do try not to carry regrets: the last 25 years of experiences - pleasant and painful - have shaped me into who I am personally. I am looking forward to the next 25 years, as I develop and grow into the person I want to be.



# Four Percent

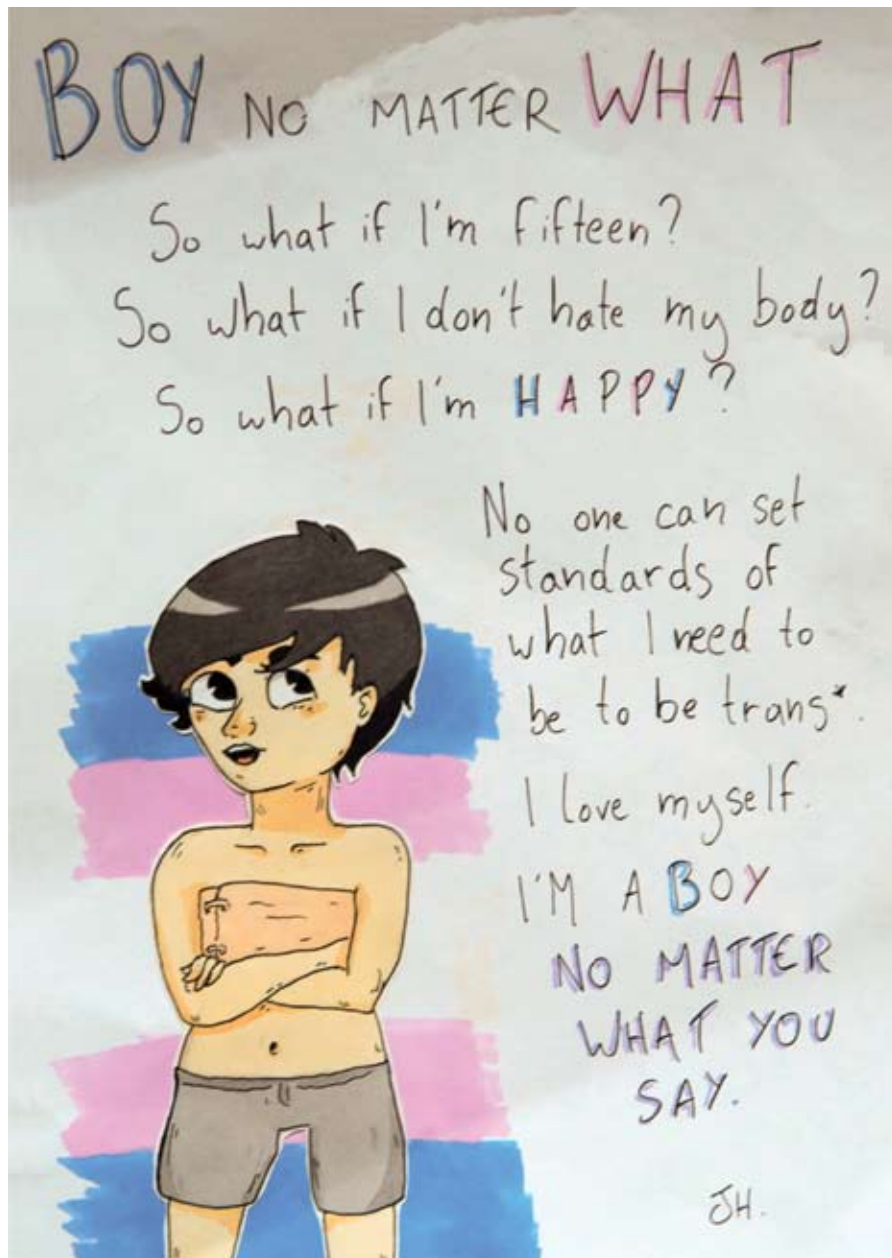
*by Hayden-Capri Hummel*

Minority  
Misunderstood; frowned upon  
Persecuted; hated upon  
Thinking, dressing, being  
That is all we do...  
Complexity craving simplicity  
That is all we do...  
Innocence  
That is what we are...  
Four percent of a hundred  
Asking for acceptance  
Four Percent Pleading;  
"Stop staring"  
Crying; the pain too much  
Four Percent Death;  
"Only escape?"  
We've all tried...  
World too cruel  
Physical better than emotional?  
Question we know the answer to  
Weak acting strong  
Scared!  
Wanting to think we are wrong Phase?  
No not me!  
Yes.  
That is what we are...  
Four Percent  
Around "Two hundred and eighty million"  
Among "Seven billion"  
A little fact forgotten?  
Society rather dismiss the truth  
Dismiss our human kind  
That is all they do...  
Denying  
Four Percent  
Shaped by others  
Despair created  
Girl forced a toy soldier  
Young boy a Barbie  
Is everyone diluted?  
World split into colours;  
"Pink & Blue"



"Cupcake Reality" In life things that are good can just crumble away and it happens very fast, so it's always best to make the most of what we have.





James

## The Violet Room

*by Sara R Phillips*

In the Violet Room, she speaks,  
Unaware of the silence  
Unaware of the sign on the wall behind me

In the Violet Room, she hears a rumour  
She cannot repeat  
She cannot repeat to anyone but you or me

In the Violet Room, the child is abandoned,  
Left for someone to see  
But it's there in the Violet Room... you left me

In the Violet Room, I dreamt it,  
On the pill that I took  
I was there on the edge the day my world shook

In the Violet Room, my mind wandered  
Where I never will know  
My memories deceive me in that violet glow

In the Violet Room, he whispered  
And told me why  
Asked me questions, so I answered with lies

In the Violet Room, my mind returned  
When they drove in the needle,  
It got badly burned

In the Violet Room, I can now know  
Why you all screamed  
When in the Violet Room I said it was easy to be me

In the Violet Room, she closed the door  
And when I came out,  
He was no more

I stood and I waited, ..... I never really knew why  
I seem to be always waiting, ..... at least for a while  
I stood and I waited, ..... I've never known whom  
Had asked me to wait in the Violet room

# Hope is a Good Thing

*by Darrin Matthews*

My mother asked me when I was 17 years old when I was in the car with her if I was transgender. Asked in such a simple manner as if she was asking what I wanted for dinner! I panicked and the first word out of my mouth was a loud unmistakable “NO” but I quickly corrected myself. Her response: “Jesus Christ, I’m your mother, you can tell me these things!” I couldn’t ask for a more amazing mother. It took my family members each their own time to get used to idea of me being their son and brother. My mother really accepted it when I told her that I could not go back to being the old me and be happy. The only choice I had in this entire process was when to begin it. If it wasn’t at 17 it would have been later on in life if I had lived long enough to get there. I was miserable as a teenager – I was bullied, had to change school, lost friends and family members. But honestly, it was all worth it. I am almost 2 years on testosterone now, and although the last 2 years have had some major ups and downs, I have never been so comfortable and happy in my life.

I have had people say to me that I am transgender because it’s easier than being a lesbian. If I decided not to transition I wouldn’t have needed 3 years of counseling before getting a formal diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder, I wouldn’t have had to legally change my name and I wouldn’t have had to go to London for my hormone treatment. If I had decided to live my life as a female I would have continued to self-harm as I had for 6 years and would most certainly be dead. Now, as the man I feel how I was meant to feel, I have amazing friends and a close family of people who love me for me and just as I always should have been. Nobody can take my happiness away and I know I’ve earned it. It’s a long process and life-long journey that will test your patience on more than one occasion but it has without a doubt been worth every step it has taken. If I can get here and be happy in my life then I truly believe that anybody else can too. I know at the beginning it can be scary and daunting but there are so many amazing people out there helps transgender people today in Ireland and it can only get better with Gender Recognition Legislation due to come in. I’m the facilitator of the Cork Trans Group and have had the pleasure of working closely with Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) and know personally that it’s getting easier every year for trans\* people in Ireland, you just have to stick around long enough to see it for yourself.

Remember: hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies. I hope to be married some day with kids and be a son, brother and father to be proud of. What do you hope for?

# Shame

*by Victoria Mullen*

She felt there was nothing left to do  
To please her family, to regain their respect.  
No help they offered, too soon to renew  
Normal relationships she should not expect.  
Barred from seeing nieces or nephews,  
Her entry to sibling homes forbidden.  
Her life insulted their moral values;  
This family stain must remain hidden.

Her sin, if a sin it ever was,  
Led to embarrassment and fear  
There was no doubt she was the cause,  
Best for all that she disappear.

Perhaps they hoped she would depart,  
Allow them forget she was ever there  
Never need explanations to impart,  
Her story they would never share.

Yet friends and strangers did not reject;  
They accepted who she became.  
This made her wonder and object  
As to who should feel the shame.

# Transvestite Blues

*by Nadia*

Rosie

Every time I hear that name it stirs deeply in my soul

That was never the name of the boy I loved

Rosie never existed yet I still find myself paying lip service to her.

The first time I had to call you Rosie it terrified me

You were my hero my idol my inspiration not afraid to be who you wanted to be

But I realised you were as scared as I am, afraid to push the definitions of who you are

When I saw your skin strip away and saw the soft breast beneath I never saw you as less of a man

Instead thought of laying my head on the pecks you moulded them into

But it was never the same after you saw my flat chest and hairy legs

And soon came the day when you started to call me Aidan and no longer see me as the woman who loved you

And instead see me as the man you could have a drink with

And even with you the one I thought understood I could never compare to a pair of tits and a clit

And just because I stand before you in a shirt and tie doesn't mean there isn't a woman waiting to get out

Nadia the girl who used to steal her Mother's make-up

Nadia who dressed up as Marilyn Monroe for Halloween so she could dress the way she wanted

Nadia who as a child imagined she was every girl on the TV always picked the female characters in video games

And everyone thinks because Aidan's still around Nadia doesn't exist

Not willing to accept that there's both a man and women in here

I'm just a cross dresser, a drag queen, a trannie

how can someone be both a man and women

but I can I am when my deep voice passes by my lipstick and stubble shows though my foundation

it makes me wish the razor I use to remove it would take my skin away as show what's underneath

I'm trapped in a reality where I'm defined by genitals and can never be anything more than what they make me

Trying to express myself as all that i am, both man and women and ending up as neither, alone unloved nothing

No shave is close enough because the hair always grows back

No tuck is good enough because my flaw always shows though

And I'm expected to know who I am when I don't even know whether to wear panties or boxers in the morning

And you, you're afraid to fall in love with me because all you know is that you're a straight man

And cock holds no place in your heart

So you run back to her instead so she can hurt you and abuse you

But she'll never make you happy

Because she may love Rosie

But I love Gregg





Stella

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For Passport Office Use  
10203387330  
ÉIRE IRELAND  
For An Post Use  
PAS10203387330  
PASSPORT APPLICATION FORM

Please complete this form in BLOCK LETTERS using black ink. Write within the boxes and do not mark or strike through other areas of the form. Please read the explanatory leaflet before completing the form. Please submit original documents only. Not photocopies.

**SECTION 1 TYPE OF PASSPORT REQUIRED (See Note 1)**

Passport Service Standard, 10 year ☒ Under 3, 3 year ☒ Over 3, under 18, 5 year ☒ Over 65, 10 year ☒ Large, 10 year 66 page ☒

Payment Method Passport Express ☒ Cheque/Bank Draft ☒ Postal Order/Money Order ☒

Mastercard ☒ Visa ☒ Laser ☒ American Express ☒ Expiry Date 00 - 00 - 00 Cash should not be sent in the post

Name on Card

Card Number

Please charge my credit/debit card with €  Signature of Cardholder

If the fee entered on this form is found to be incorrect we will charge your credit/debit card the correct fee for the service requested.

**SECTION 2 APPLICANT DETAILS (See Note 2)**

**A Name To Appear On Passport (See Note 2A)**

Surname McILROY

Forenames (1) CATALYST (2)

**B Name On Birth Certificate (See Note 2B)**  
This Section must be completed in all cases, failure to do so will result in your passport being refused.

Surname

Forenames (1)  (2)

Forenames (3)

**GENDER UNSPECIFIED**

Do you also wish to have your birth certificate name noted on your passport? (Observations will appear only if your birth name is different from the name to appear on your passport) Yes ☐ No ☒

**C Date of Birth** 00 - 00 - 0000 Gender Male ☒ Female ☒ Your PPSN

Birth Surname of Mother

**SECTION 3 CITIZENSHIP (See Note 3)**

**COUNTY of BIRTH** (If born abroad insert name of COUNTRY)

Please indicate the citizenship category to which you belong. (Tick ONE category only. A or B or C)

**A** ☒ Born in Ireland

**B** ☐ Born abroad to a parent born in Ireland  
Please enclose original birth certificate and marriage certificate, if applicable, of the parent born in Ireland.

**Details of Parent Born in Ireland**

Birth Surname

Birth Forename  Date of Birth 00 - 00 - 0000

County of Birth

**C** ☐ Naturalisation ☐ Foreign Birth Registration ☐ Post Nuptial ☐ Born abroad & adopted under Irish Law by an Irish citizen ☐

Enclose originals of all certificates

Gender Unspecified by Cat McIlroy

## Credits

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Photography on page 38 appears courtesy of Peter Fingleton.

Photographs on pages 46-49 appear courtesy of the project *Transgender Ireland* © Alison McDonnell. Her ongoing project is a social documentary exploring transgender people and experiences in Ireland. For further details and to participate see <http://nocheeseplease.tumblr.com>

The artwork appearing on the inner covers form part of a project by Evan Johnson *The project I'm working on acts as an ongoing commentary or conversation with the process of a body becoming male. I can never provide a complete document of this change. I think that sometimes very little and apparently unimportant things that we do or experience are lost or forgotten, regardless of how much they can impact our everyday lives. As simple and seemingly insignificant as cutting one's hair can be, it can still be one of the many important steps towards reflecting that foremost inner sense of self. Whether it is something everyone or no-one else sees, each step towards one's own goal should and does have a place as one of many chapters in our own stories.*

*The Violet Room* by Sara Phillips on page 65 was first presented 19-21 June 2008 as part of the art installation 'The Resembled Self' by BEARDEDMETEOR PRODUCTIONS at Pallas Contemporary

Projects, 111 Grangegormon Road  
Lower, Dublin 7. See [pallasprojects.org](http://pallasprojects.org)  
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Some of the people wished to contribute anonymously or simply for their names to be included.

The other contributors are:

Inner Front Cover: *Male Hair Pattern* by **Evan Johnson**, 23. Graduate in Fine Art, with a specialised research area in gender-theory - between bouts of recreational doodling.

Pages 10-11, 46, 71: **Cat McIlroy**, trans\* activist and eternal optimist. "To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment" - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Pages 12-15, **Susan**, fortysomething, TV, Dublin.

Page 16, **Donna**, aged 20. Always listen to your heart, never be afraid of who you are, be brave and live your life for you... and always remember you're beautiful, no matter what XXX

Pages 20, 48, **Broden Giambrone**, trans man, Director of TENI, loves puffs.

Page 21, **Donna**. See p. 16.

Pages 22-23, 47, **Ariel Silvera** is an Argentinian geek trans-dyke with a ladygent style who loves feminism and listens to way too much riot grrrl and tango for her own good. She was into vampires before it was uncool.

Page 24, **Leo**, 16, from Russia - Queer without Fear!

Page 25, **Sean**, 28, boylesque performer and party animal!!

Pages 28-32 represent contributions from BeLonGTo's **IndividualiTy**:

We are a group of young trans people that meets weekly to have fun, share our opinions and make friends. "Collectively we are individuals" - Allie

Page 27, **Sam**, aged 18, nerdy gender-queer transguy from Wicklow.

Page 30, **Raz**, aged 18, Dublin gender-queer. "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." - Lucille Ball.

Page 31, **Etchers**, I am a person. I have always been a person to the best of my knowledge and I am a writer. I blog at: [thenocturnalradio.blogspot.com](http://thenocturnalradio.blogspot.com).

Page 32, **Alice**, 15 year-old trans guy who likes writing things.

Pages 34-36, **Louise Hannon**, photographer, public speaker, writer of sorts and fixer.

Page 37, **Louise Walsh**, mother of two, Dublin. "It is better to be hated for who we are than loved for who we are not."

**Mick Casey**, I live in Bray, Co.Wicklow & I like all music but I'm a big fan of Joe Dolan. See [www.allkindsofeverything.org](http://www.allkindsofeverything.org) and [www.tonysnewsletter.com](http://www.tonysnewsletter.com)

Pages 40-41, **Ben Power**, 31, from Cork, "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined." -- Henry David Thoreau

Pages 44-45, **Zoë Conlon**, aged 21yrs, Dundalk.

Pages 49-53, **Deirdre O'Byrne**, 42 year-old Dubliner; astronomy, I.T. and travel geek, and general trouble-maker, who is just trying to walk her walk.

Page 56, **Beth Goode**, 36, single and straight (as in I don't fancy men) and I have no kids. I am from Dublin, I go to church sometimes, I eat too much, I have a shaky hand and something I snore. In short, I'm human and I hope you are too.

Page 57, **Lisa**, I'm just Lisa.

Page 60, **Annabelle Larousse**, dreaming of a world in which she can just be herself.

Pages 62-63, **Hayden-Capri Hummel**, 18. Photographer and Poet.

Page 64, **James**, 15 year old from Dublin, aspiring to write educational LGBT books for children and publish more artwork, and do further work in trans\* activism.

Page 65, **Sara R Phillips**, - "This Journey isn't over..."

Page 66, **Darrin Matthews**, 22, Cork. "Love the life you live, live the life you love" - Bob Marley

Page 67, **Victoria Mullen**, Now living "happily ever after" - at least as far as Gender goes.

Pages 68-69, **Aidan/Nadia**, Genderfluid poet from Dublin.

Page 70, **Stella Stellar**, 40, West Cork

Inner Back Cover: *Hair Overlay* by **Evan Johnson**.





Family





