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Life as a Young Boy

1. Even as a young boy I already knew that I was special. Anything feminine caught my attention. I loved dressing in my mother's clothes. My mother never scolded me for this, but she warned me not to let my father see me in her clothes because he would get upset.
2. Once, when I was around five years old, my father came home while I was dressed in my mother's clothes. He smacked me hard across my bottom. He told me that I wasn't a woman and had no reason to be dressing as a woman.
3. I was happy to start going to Kindergarten when I was six years old, but starting early on in school I was picked on by my classmates because I was effeminate. As a result, I was isolated throughout my years at school. I was called a faggot and told that no one wanted to be near me because I was contagious. When we played sports, no one wanted me on their team because they said I played like a girl.
4. When my siblings and I had arguments, they called me a faggot, but they only did this when my father wasn't around because they knew how enraged he could get over the thought of his son being a faggot.
5. Many of my father's co-workers had noticed that I was effeminate and said things about homosexuality to my father. Sometimes I heard them talking negatively with my father about gay people. They said that gay people were the worst thing that could exist in this world. Once, I heard a co-worker tell my father that if he were to have a gay son he would rather kill him than have him as a son. I felt that this might have been in reference to me.



Freedom Network USA

6. My father often said vile things about gay and transgender people. It made me angry to hear my father say things like this. I thought to myself, “that is how I am,” but I knew I couldn’t say anything back to him or he would hit me. It was especially upsetting when my father said that if he had a “queer” for son, he would put a stop to that behavior by beating him. I feared that if my father or others in the community knew how I was different that I would be in physical danger.
7. At that age, I didn’t necessarily know that I wanted to live my life as a woman. I just knew that I was drawn to anything feminine.

First Months in Washington, D.C.

8. I left home when I turned seventeen. I had saved up enough money to get a bus ticket to Washington, D.C. to live with my older cousin Charlie. Once there, Charlie tried for three months to find me a job at restaurants in the city. However, once the owners saw me, they refused to hire me. I was small and was very feminine looking. They said I looked much too young and weak, like someone who was supposed to be in school, not working.
9. Finally, a few months after moving in with Charlie, I found my first job as a dishwasher at a restaurant. I worked 12-hour shifts; my official hours were from 10am until 10pm, but I frequently had to stay until midnight because I couldn’t finish my work in time.
10. While I was working at the restaurant, I started to wear makeup. I was finally free from my father and had a little money in my pocket, so I felt a little more free. I started out just tweezing my eyebrows and curling my eyelashes. I remembered enjoying watching my mother put powder on her face, so I also started putting on powder and wearing mascara.



Freedom Network USA

11. One of the cooks at the restaurant constantly harassed me, calling me “little faggot” and throwing things at me when he got angry at me for not doing something right.
12. After about nine months of working at the restaurant, my boss fired me. He said that it was just too much work for me and that I lacked the capacity to do it all. He said that I was not learning fast enough.
13. After I lost my job, Charlie pressured me a lot to find work. He told me that I was here for work, not for a vacation, and that I needed to contribute to the rent. He kept a list of all the debts I owed him while I stayed at his apartment, and told me I had to pay it back. The list included food, utilities, rent, and other expenses. I felt really bad for being there without contributing financially to the household.
14. Charlie especially didn’t like me when he started to notice the make-up I was using. He called me a faggot and tried to make me dress in a more masculine way. Sometimes when Charlie was drunk he forced me to sit at the kitchen table with him to badger me about my sexuality. He thought he could change my sexual preference by forcing me to go to female prostitutes, so he often threatened to take me somewhere to “turn me into a man.”

Gender Transition

15. About a month after I lost my job at the restaurant, I was introduced through a family friend to a transgender woman named Rachel. At eighteen years old, I had never met a transgender person before. I was amazed at how much Rachel really looked like a woman. I never could have imagined that a man could transform himself so well that they could live as a woman on a daily basis and really look like a woman.



Freedom Network USA

16. Over the next couple of months, Rachel and I became close friends. She was almost twenty years older than me, so she became kind of a mentor to me. She loaned me woman's clothing, shoes, and accessories. The first time that we went out dressed as women, she asked me how I felt. I was very excited because I loved dressing as a woman. I loved everything about the process of getting ready to go out as a woman. I wanted to be able to live as a woman full-time, but I knew I couldn't live like this at Charlie's house.

Introduction to Sex Work

17. When I told Rachel about the bad situation with Charlie, she told me that she could take me somewhere I could make money to get my own place. Rachel was the first person to tell me that I could get paid for having sex. At the time, Rachel was engaging in prostitution at a gay and transgender bar at the other end of town.

18. Rachel told me that I needed to dress up as a woman and look presentable in order to get clients. She told me I had to wear a wig and a mini-skirt and show off my legs, especially since I didn't yet have breasts. So, I began to go with Rachel to the bar to engage in prostitution.

19. About a month later, when I was still eighteen years old, I moved out of Charlie's house. I was so uncomfortable there that I finally decided that leaving his home was the best thing I could do for both of us.

20. I started looking for a place to live on my own, but it was difficult. No one wanted to rent to me because of my age and because, when I was asked about employment, I said I didn't have a job. I was too embarrassed to say that I was engaging in prostitution.



Freedom Network USA

21. Finally, I found a nice woman who was renting a small room in her apartment who didn't ask any questions. I moved in the next day. When I began living on my own I felt a sense of freedom, being away from Charlie's negativity, but it was also scary. I was even more desperate to make money to pay my rent. I did not see another option, and so I continued to go with Rachel to the bar on a nightly basis to engage in prostitution.

Working in the Sex Industry

22. I had to engage in prostitution seven days a week to be able to pay my rent. It was difficult to find clients in the bar because the women there were very protective of their regular customers and didn't want me talking to them.

23. Most of the clients I did find took advantage of me in every way they possibly could because I was so young and naïve. They said demeaning things when they saw my sock-stuffed bra and wig and humiliated me. On many occasions, they told me that since every female aspect I had was fake, they should only have to pay me half of the agreed upon price. Sometimes they refused to pay me at all afterwards.

24. I noticed that when some of the other women in the bar had trouble finding clients, they looked for clients on the street. They often came back several hours later with a lot of money. A few weeks after I started at the bar, I began to engage in prostitution on the street like them so that I could make more money.

25. The street was a horrible place for me. There were purse-snatchers, clients who didn't want to pay, undercover police officers, and pimps. Pimps frequently harassed trans



Freedom Network USA

people who were engaging in prostitution in their territories. They yelled at me to get off their block, insulted me, and threatened to beat me. I was so scared of them.

26. This time in my life was difficult and dangerous. My income was unstable, and I never knew how much I was going to make a night or if I would have enough money to pay my bills. But I didn't see any other options open to me besides engaging in prostitution.

27. After about six months, I got evicted for not paying rent. I was still close with Rachel, and she told me I could come stay with her for free. It was nice at first to live with another person who was born male but who dressed as a woman. However, after a few weeks, Rachel started to tell me that I needed to contribute for rent. I was still engaging in prostitution after I moved in with her, but after those few weeks she started demanding that I give her all the money I earned each night. She said she was keeping some of it for herself for rent but was saving some of it for me in the bank since I did not have a back account.

28. Once I started giving my money to Rachel, things got much worse. She wouldn't let me back in the house unless I met my quota for the night, and the quota got higher every few weeks. Sometimes when I didn't meet the quota but was too exhausted to stay out, I would come home and sleep on the front stoop.

Arrests and Harassment

29. I remember the first time I was arrested very clearly. I was nineteen years old. That night, a car drove up and asked me how much I charged for oral sex. After I gave them a price, they immediately jumped out of the car and arrested me. They were undercover cops



Freedom Network USA

dressed in street clothes. They put me in a white van that had no windows. I imagined the worst and was scared out of my mind, but fortunately, they let me go the next day.

30. I was arrested several more times right around the same as the first arrest. It is difficult to remember the details of each arrest because for the most part, they blur together. I had a public defender who helped me each time I got arrested. She told me it would be best to plead guilty because I would spend less time in jail. I didn't want to be in jail because I was worried about how I would be treated, so I agreed.

31. After each arrest, Rachel would pick me up and get angry at me for being arrested. She would make me stay out longer hours over the next few days to make up for missing a night.

Starting a New Life

32. After my last court date, my public defender put me in touch with a social worker who she said could help me. This social worker helped me realize that there was a better future out there for me and got me into a shelter where I would be away from Rachel. I never got the money back that Rachel said she was saving for me, but this was the time I finally decided I needed to make a major change regardless of the money.

33. After I was in the shelter for 90 days, the social worker helped me find the temporary housing where I live now and the city supplements my rent.

34. It is very important to me to put these negative experiences behind me and start a new chapter of my life. My primary goal is to have stable employment and income. In the short term, I envision myself working as a hostess in a restaurant or as a sales clerk in a clothing store. In the long term, I want to open my own clothing boutique. I also have a



Freedom Network USA

strong interest in biology, and I would love to find a way to go back to school to pursue this interest.

35. When I think about actually having a choice in jobs I feel very happy knowing that I could choose a job where I am free from others' negative feelings about my gender identity and be in a comfortable, safe, and humiliation-free environment. I want to be a role model and show society and transgender youth that we don't have to tolerate discrimination.

36. Issues with my transgender identity will always be there, but I really want to fight for my future so that society can see that anyone can achieve their dreams. I am happy, determined, and ready to start a new chapter in life.

Relief Requested

37. I am now seeking to have my convictions vacated as they represent obstacles to my future progress and success. They limit my possibilities of applying for jobs, leading a successful life, and being a productive member of society. Most importantly, they leave me with an adult record for conduct I was compelled to engage in as a desperate and vulnerable transgender young person.

38. Vacatur of these convictions would mean a completely different life for me. I could close this cycle and start new. I could stop living in the shadows where my voice is not heard.