

René's Story

Author: René, OII Spokesperson from Belgium.

I can say that I became an adult at seven years old. When I saw that I looked more like my sister who had just been born than my brother who was four years younger than I was! Before the birth of my sister, when I was naked, I had noticed there was a difference between my brother and me: he was a standard male at birth. I could see clearly that there was something not quite right. But when my sister arrived, I saw that I looked more like her than my brother and at that moment, I was an adult. You become an adult when you start coming to terms with being intersex: a micropenis, what I called my 'comma.'

When I was fourteen years old, in 1967, they had planned an operation for me in Germany to remove the micropenis and to make me a woman. But I refused. I saw my future flash before my eyes, myself as a woman, if they cut off 'my comma.' I already had big feet: I could not see myself in high heels and a skirt! I knew I was a tomboy, but I did not feel like having my 'chassis' fixed. I think that I was not mistaken in making this choice. When I saw the film *XXY*, it upset me. It took me back to when I was 15 years old. It confirmed my choice.

For me to live as a woman would be like having to be in drag all the time.

It wasn't until 1980 that I started testosterone, that is, when I was 27, because the year before I had made one my most dangerous suicide attempts by running a car into a stone quarry after taking medication. During the 70s I had already attempted suicide around 20 times. I felt like there

was no place for me in society, even if I lived with heterosexual women. After a major suicide attempt, I was placed in a neuropsychiatric clinic, and there, I could not stand to take showers with adult men. I did not fit into a clinic for men. I would have fit in better in a clinic for women. Then I was referred to an endocrinologist who urged me to start testosterone therapy and that lasted 20 years, until 2001. I had promised a girlfriend that I would undergo this treatment, a girlfriend who was aware of my distress. So, I kept my promise.

What was positive about the treatment was that I was not taken for a 'faggot.'

Before starting the treatment, I had effeminate mannerisms.

I tried to

overcompensate for them. I tried to mimic men in order to stop the abuse of being treated like a 'fag.' I did everything I could so that I would match up with what my ID card said: *male*. But masculinity was not that easy for me. When I was a teenager, my mother would tell me: "But run right, René!" I ran like a girl.

After the treatment, I was virilized and I regretted not having done it sooner.

This possibility had been hidden from me even though I had asked about it when I was a teenager.

Now, I no longer have a high pitched voice (too bad because I did have a pretty voice and it was broken). And then I started working out and doing a lot of sports and started looking like a 'muscle man.' This changed my appearance in such a manner than I now look like what my ID card says. Without the testosterone, I would have been very androgynous.

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Originally published in French, in the book *Ni homme, ni femme*, by Julien Picquart.

Translation by Curtis Hinkle, Organisation Internationale des Intersexués 2009.

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I have won my battle! Even though I do have a certain nostalgia for the time when I had to put up a fight, in the 70s, for certain positive aspects of my difference, I still am proud to have come through this struggle alone. I proved all the prognoses wrong. I was told that I would not make it, that I would not live beyond age 25 because of suicide or some medical problem.

But I won. All that I have gone through was worth it. It was a beautiful experience in the end.

Under normal circumstances, I should not have stopped the treatment. It was for life. But I was afraid. I was afraid of coming down with something very serious and I could no longer manage my emotions. I became very aggressive, directed principally against myself. I got into street fights and I was afraid of killing someone. I could not manage this force within me, this anger. I was afraid of myself. That was why I stopped. I was afraid of losing all control, of not having some type of brake. Today, I have to start all over again because of my metabolism which has been seriously affected. I become very weak and the doctors have told me that I must take the treatment. I am aging very fast. At 55 I feel like an old man. To get around is very difficult

both physically and mentally. I am becoming shapeless.

I feel cut off from the system. And sexually, the flame burnt out.

It is because of a lack of understanding: I am not taken seriously. So, I go back into my shell and waste away. Today, I live a very lonely life and have basically cut myself off from the mainstream. I live the life of a recluse in my apartment and suffer from severe agoraphobia. I am fighting against a system that did not want me. It makes you

wonder why you are on this planet earth. I am no one's father, no one's mother. A failure, a big disappointment. It wasn't until December 2007 that I knew that I was not the only one in this situation. If I had not had the Internet and OII (the Organisation Intersex International), I think I would have committed suicide.

I was headed in that direction.

I would like to have the right

to love, to be loved for who I am. I have never had that. There has always been this, why this or why that, to contend with. If a woman wants an aggressive, masculine side, I cannot grant that wish. It does not suit me and I am not gay so I don't have that as an outlet either. Even with lesbians, I am uncomfortable. I have often run away if I thought I was appealing to someone – all this because I am a walled off woman and an incomplete man. I often say that I am a clock without hands. I go tick tock but I don't tell the time. ❁

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