

When Did You Know and Who Did You Tell?

By
Beverly Gandara



Photo by Chrissy Blake

JADE

Born in Del Rio Texas on a military base and raised in Las Vegas in a religious household, Jade, one of six children, two boys and four girls, knew by the age of eight that although born a boy, he was meant to be a girl.

Without knowledge of the existence of transgender opportunities, Jade and her family went through a horrific journey which eventually led to Jade's long but triumphant transition to the beautiful woman she is today.

A talented salesperson, Jade is a successful Senior Talent Development Consultant for a major technology firm and is well-respected in the industry.

With an intimate understanding of the process, and a concern for those in transition, Jade volunteers with an organization that assists people and their families on their journey. She is warm and loving and continues to enjoy life as her authentic self.

I met Jade through an introduction by Gina (see page ____). Jade is open and willing to share her story with the intention of helping those on the same journey. She is kind and supportive. I am delighted that she agreed to tell her compelling story.

Here are her answers to the questions:

How do you identify and what pronouns you use?

I identify as a woman. My pronouns are She/Her.

When did you know you were a member of the LGBTQIA+ Community?

By the age of eight, although born a boy, I felt like a girl and acted like a girl. I dressed in girl's clothes and played with dolls. My mother thought it was a phase and I would grow out of it. My first attempt at suicide was at the age of eight.

Who did you tell and how did they react?

By the age of thirteen, I told my parents that I wasn't gay but that I was meant to be a girl. I did not know what that meant or that there was a method by which I could actually become a girl. They were scared, I was scared. They worried about my safety and what other people would think about them. They believed I made a choice against what they believed, and they rejected the thought of it.

Where were you born and raised?

I was born in Del Rio, Texas on an Air Force Base and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada.

How would you describe your childhood environment?

Painful. I had a strict religious upbringing. My father is a military man. I am one of six children, two boys and four girls. My brother was a man's man and clearly, I was a disappointment to my father, dressing up and acting as a girl. I was lost. It was hard.

My parents sent me to several different therapists, one of whom suggested that my parents should buy me girl's clothes so I wouldn't have to steal my sisters' clothes any longer. My father rejected that idea outright and refused to allow his son to dress as a girl. "No son of mine is going to wear girls' clothing. I will not support this behavior." Not one therapist ever mentioned gender identity, suggested gender reassignment therapy, or used the term transgender. In the 90's a therapist mentioned that I might be a cross-dresser. They clearly had no idea why I was suffering.

By the age of twelve or thirteen, unbeknownst to my parents, I shaved my legs, dressed as a girl in full makeup and short skirts and often snuck out of the house late at night, walking the streets of Las Vegas. It was freeing and terrifying. I desperately wanted to be accepted and loved as a female. As I walked, I thought it was me against the world, my family, and my religion. I was depressed, misunderstood and unhappy with my life. I was in great pain.

I became a cutter and would cut my arm to deal with the pain of not being able to be my authentic self. There were several more attempts at suicide* that required hospitalization to get the psychiatric attention that I needed. I had very hard teenage years.

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**As per articles on the government website <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32345113/>, statistics show that as of 2020 82% of transgender individuals have considered suicide and 40% have attempted to kill themselves with suicidality rate highest among transgender youth.*

Austin A, Craig SL, D'Souza S, McInroy LB. Suicidality Among Transgender Youth: Elucidating the Role of Interpersonal Risk Factors. J Interpers Violence. 2022 Mar;37(5-6):NP2696-NP2718. doi: 10.1177/0886260520915554. Epub 2020 Apr 29. Erratum in: J Interpers Violence. 2020 Jul 29;:886260520946128. PMID: 32345113.

I struggled with the thought of dying but I knew I did not want to die as a boy. I wanted to give myself an opportunity to be a girl. I didn't know how or even if it was possible so I vowed to be the best boy I could – for them. I felt like I was dying. I knew I was different and understood I didn't quite fit in. It became harder and harder to accept the fact that I might have a chance at happiness.

I had no reference for what I was feeling until I was nineteen when I heard the word *transgender* and identified with that.

As a child, what did you hope to be when you grew up?

Being raised in a religious home, I was taught that women had a special place in society as a wife and a mother – that was what I had hoped to be.

As a young person, what difficulties did you have to overcome to move towards your goals?

Most people believed I was gay; there was homophobia. I am multi-cultural; there was bigotry and racial discrimination. I didn't deal directly with those challenges because I couldn't fault anyone if they did not understand what they were doing, and never learned how to share, so for the most part, I ignored that behavior from others. My main challenge was learning to love and accept myself.

How much training did your work require?

Very little. My first job was as a stock boy loading merchandise on shelves during the night shift of a large retail store.

I worked in telemarketing sales which was easier for me as opposed to working in front of people. While working for different companies, I discovered I have excellent sales skills and was the top salesperson in each company I worked for.

I worked my way up and am now a Senior Talent Development Consultant for a major technology firm. I hold three-week training sessions to help develop companies' talent to enable them to have the knowledge, resources, and tools to work with the products that we serve our customers with. I hold twenty-four sessions a year and have been doing that for the past five years. Prior to Covid, I trained hundreds of professionals across the world. Since Covid, I train remotely which allows me to support a larger segment.

Once you entered the workplace, what obstacles did you have to overcome?

I was eighteen when my mother caught me dressed for work as a woman and we had a horrible fight. I left the house that night and never returned. In one weekend, I lost my family, my friends, and my religion. Had I been gay, there would have been some understanding. Cross-dressing wasn't quite the right word for me. I was a female. I didn't know how to explain that to people. I just didn't know the words transsexual or transgender. I didn't know anybody like me. I felt isolated and depressed.

I moved in with a co-worker and her family, paid rent and they let me be me. I am grateful for people in the early years who didn't understand but accepted me. I dressed as a woman and lived as a woman full-time. I wanted to be the perfect woman, accepted, and loved as a woman. I didn't love myself and looked to others to do that. I worried about the clothes I wore, if I was enough of woman, if I was thin enough, pretty enough. I developed an eating disorder. I was in great pain and began to drink to deaden the anguish. I became an alcoholic.

My first rehab was at the age of nineteen. I went through thirty-day inpatient treatments twice. The second time, it gave me the tools that I needed to deal with life's challenges without the use of alcohol.

When did you transition from a male to a female and how long did it take?

I did not know anyone who had transitioned, nor did I know how to go about it. It took a very long time for me. It began after I left home. When I was about twenty-three or twenty-four, I met people who had transitioned, and I began taking hormones which helped me physically. I was petite, skinny, exotic-looking and blended in easily as a woman.

There are risks with taking hormones. They can cause mental instability, especially if there is already a struggle for mental health balance.

I had to commit to the permanence of living fully as a woman. There was a lot of mental anguish and suffering before I had sexual reassignment surgeries. I don't believe God makes mistakes. I hesitated for the longest time because of the fear of permanence and the thought, "What if I change my mind?" It cannot be reversed.

I was in the middle and scared. I learned transition happens inside first, emotionally, and mentally. I had hope and knew that I was not alone but was I up for the challenge? Yes, I knew I could get through it. I completed my transition at the age of twenty-nine.

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Transition means a lot of different things to different people. I volunteered at a center that served transgender people. There are many options available. Some will choose certain surgeries; some will never have surgery.

What are your current goals?

Take care of my health, which is a priority. Travel as much as possible, spend time with family and friends. Getting back out into the world, growing in my career.

How do you spend your leisure time?

With my family and friends. I have twelve nieces and nephews who I love dearly. My parents live locally. I am blessed to have a big family. We are close and spend a lot of time together. I am so grateful to be a part of their lives and love attending birthday parties, dance recitals, band performances and more. We recently had a birthday party for one of my nephews who just turned ten. It was a Nerf Gun War party. There were parents, grandparents, cousins, etc.

It took about ten years for us to reconnect after I left home. Through various programs, I learned to respect their beliefs, accept them as they are rather than as I wanted them to be, loving them from afar. I didn't try to change them.

My family evolved too. Eventually they learned to accept and respect me even if they didn't understand me. I think of my brother often. It must have been difficult for him not to have the brother he expected. He reached out to me when he learned I was in a loving relationship and congratulated me. He told me he loved me very much and thought I was beautiful. Sadly, he died at the age of thirty-three from a heart attack.



With my proud parents.

What frightens you?

Dying without fulfilling my purpose. I am not sure I found it 100% but I know I am here to help other people. I volunteer with a religious charity aiding abused and human-trafficked women.

What saddens you?

Injustice of any kind, abuse, neglect, the suffering of other people.

Wishing I could have done better in the past. I can't go back with what I know now. Reckoning with myself, I understand if I could have done better, I would have. I did the best I could.

What pleases you?

Helping other people, being of service. I know two people who have transgender children. One is twelve and the other is fourteen. They are both girls transgendered to boys. The parents called me sobbing. I was able to share my experience with them. I understood what they were all going through and helped make their journeys a little easier.

It's important to find an example of who you want to be and go for it. That's probably what I wanted when I was in a world we didn't know that existed.

Having the opportunity to learn how to love myself is an evolving process for me. I have to really work at it. Being on my own side, trying to better myself and grow as a human being. I learned that you can't love anyone else until you love yourself. I never believed that before.

My family pleases me. It took a long time before we re-connected but we are all very close and I stay busy with all the family celebrations and activities.



With my sister, Samantha.

What advice would you give your younger self?

Be kind, be brave, be bold. You're going to make it through. Be gentle with yourself. Be on your own side. Others won't; you need to be.

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MY WORDS; MY VOICE

For a long time, I felt like I was the only one in the world who had this unique struggle and years later I come to find that tons of other people feel the way I felt so that it is my responsibility to be there to love and support those who come behind me and show them that they are going to be okay too. Remember no one is going to love you better than you.

Thank you, Bev for giving me a platform to share my journey to become my authentic self. I am honored and thrilled that my family chose to support my interview.