

WE ARE NEW HAMPSHIRE

Transgender Lives in the Granite State



Many people have a vague sense of what it means to be transgender. Perhaps they recently saw Chaz Bono perform on *Dancing with the Stars*, or they remember Christine Jorgensen. But transgender people come from all backgrounds, and no individual can convey the full diversity of the transgender community—either here in New Hampshire or across the country.

This book is meant to capture some of the many stories of transgender individuals and their loved ones living in New Hampshire. You will meet people like Megan, who overcame tremendous odds to become the person she is today; Drew, who is a happier person after coming to terms with his transgender identity; and Muriel, a mom who just wants her transgender son to be loved.

As you read these stories, one of the themes that emerges is the seriousness with which people have made the difficult decision to transition from their birth gender and live in their affirmed gender. Given the extreme, disproportionate discrimination and violence transgender people face, and the lack of legal protections in most of the country—including New Hampshire—in employment, housing, and public accommodations, the decision to change genders is not one any individual takes lightly. In fact, pervasive discrimination makes transgender individuals much more likely to fall into poverty than the general population, despite higher levels of education.

At the same time, many of these stories make clear that when given the same opportunities to work, live and participate in society, transgender individuals are capable of extraordinary success and contribution to society.

In other words, when we protect each other, everyone benefits.

But unfortunately it is still legal in New Hampshire to discriminate against, harass, or attack a person for being transgender. That is why it is so important that we support full legal protections for transgender individuals.

Our hope is that by reading these stories of real New Hampshire residents, you will better understand the full humanity of transgender people. They are your family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors, and they want nothing more, and nothing less, than to be treated with respect and dignity.

To learn more about how to help, please visit www.glad.org/nh-stories

We Are New Hampshire

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Muriel Pierce's (right) unwavering support helped her son Luke (left) through his transition.

We All Want Our Kids to Be Loved **Muriel Pierce**

In the summer of 2010, Muriel Pierce's son Luke married the woman he loves, Dori. During his toast at the rehearsal dinner, the bride's father confessed that his long-held private anxiety was simply whether Dori would find someone who would love her for who she is. But seeing how happy she was with Luke, he said, his fear was put to rest.

Muriel had the same fear for her son, who is transgender.

"That was the only concern really, when he transitioned: are you going to find a person to adore you in the way we all want our kids to be loved?" she says. "I feel so lucky that their paths crossed. It's magic."

Luke had previously come out as transgender to Dori's parents, and they fully embraced him. As Muriel recalls, they told him, "Whoever you are, if she loves you then we love you."

The couple now makes their home in Western Massachusetts, where Luke, 31, is completing a Master's in Social Work from Smith

College. His passion for social justice began in high school, when he started his school's first Gay/Straight Alliance. Since then he has worked with LGBTQ communities on issues from homelessness to HIV to substance abuse. Most recently, he founded a community center for transgender people in San Francisco. Dori is a clinical herbalist and teacher.

Luke is the youngest of Muriel's three children. Now living in Somersworth, she raised him in Durham, where she teaches Special Education at Oyster River Middle School.

Luke's transformation from daughter to son was gradual, and began in high school. By the time of his senior year at Brown he was identifying as transgender, being referred to with male pronouns, and was known to friends, family and the world as Luke.

Muriel struggled at times to understand the transition her child was making, but her love and support never wavered. "Honestly it was all new territory for me," she says. "I grew up in a small town and I just never really thought about it."

**43% of transgender people
report having maintained the
majority of family bonds**

When Luke decided to undergo medical treatment related to his gender transition during college, she accompanied him to San Francisco to lend moral support and care for him during his recovery.

"I was really glad he allowed me to go with him," Muriel says, noting that she encountered many other transgender people seeking treatment from Luke's doctor who were alone. "A lot of them were just terrified."

Now, when people ask how her daughter is doing, Muriel simply tells them about Luke. "I feel like it's a little thing I can do to educate people. I'm not embarrassed. I'm proud of him," she says. "He has

more integrity and more honesty than any person I know,” she adds. “He really does—and it has not been easy.”

While Luke has created a happy and healthy life for himself, Muriel is aware of the hostility and violence that transgender people continue to face in society.

“I guess my remaining fear for him is that something’s going to happen, that somebody’s going to beat him up, that he’s going to be found out by somebody who can’t deal with it,” she says. “That’s my big fear.”

Putting her fears for Luke’s safety aside, Muriel says she feels blessed to have a son who has so courageously worked to live his life authentically and who has been rewarded as a result.

“I love him so much and I know that his road was really difficult, and he did it on his own,” she says. “He was the one who had to be scared and make these decisions and come out to people and all that, but it’s worked and now he has a life partner and he has a new family, too, that loves him.” ♦

57% of transgender people
report having
experienced **significant**
family rejection



Nothing can stop truckdriver Gerri Cannon (center) from living her life to its fullest.

Being Transgender is Just Living My Life **Gerri Cannon**

“Driving a tractor trailer is a lifestyle,” says Gerri Cannon. “Being transgender is just living my life.”

Gerri knows of what she speaks, since she spends more time behind the wheel of her Kenworth than she does at home in Merrimack. “It’s a gorgeous truck,” she says of her 70-foot 18-wheeler. “It’s a lot of truck.”

She’s logged about 210,000 miles over the past 18 months for Con-Way Truckload, a multi-billion dollar freight transportation company headquartered in Missouri. Gerri drives up to 11 hours a day, takes a 10 hour break, then repeats the process for a 70-hour work week. “I’m on the road four to six weeks at a time,” she says. “That’s an over the road truck driver’s life.”

As a transgender woman, she’s grateful to be driving cross-country for a company she says is committed to diversity. There’s a “good mix of folks” among her friendly fellow drivers, says Gerri, including many other women and husband/wife teams. Con-Way provides workplace protections, including for transgender people. “That’s the way the world is supposed to be,” she says of her work environment.

It’s dramatically different from her first trucking job, with a Phoenix-based company, a few years ago. After first telling Gerri that

being transgender wasn't an issue, the man assigned to train her later called and said, "I'm not sure I can train a transgender." Rather than addressing the discriminatory behavior, the company instead connected Gerri with a driver who was a cross-dresser, even though his training certification had lapsed, meaning Gerri would have to wait until he was re-certified. Meanwhile, she recalls, "I'm sitting here in Merrimack, with no job, not making any money and not on the road." Taking matters into her own hands, she emailed a corporate officer to explain the situation and within days she was being trained by a driver who later told Gerri she was one of his best students.

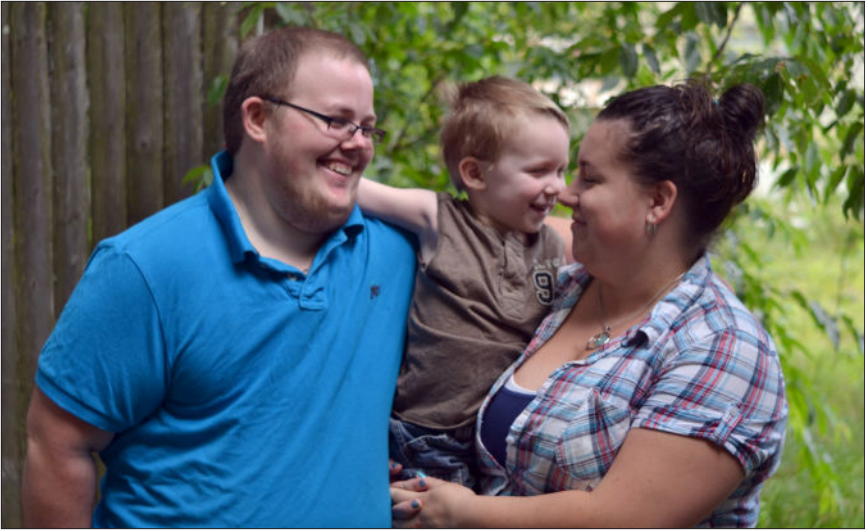
When she's not on the road, Gerri, 59, visits with her two adult daughters and attends Pilgrim Congregational Church in Nashua, where she found a supportive community after she started her transition. Returning after long stretches on the road, Gerri says, "everyone is all over me: 'Oh Gerri, we missed you!' It's great."

**47% of transgender people
report having been fired, not hired,
or denied a promotion
because of being transgender**

Gerri also volunteers doing educational and advocacy work on behalf of New Hampshire's transgender and LGBT community. "In being more comfortable out in the public eye I've established more friendships and more connections than I've ever experienced in my life," she says.

After sharing her story in a local newspaper about five years ago, Gerri attended a meeting of her congregation's over-50 group. Some congregants didn't know until then that Gerri is transgender, and were a little taken aback and initially standoffish. She says they quickly warmed up again after realizing that Gerri is the same person they have always known.

"It was just something they learned about me that was new," she says. "And it became no big deal. I ended up with a lot more supporters in my



Invasive questions intrude on Kaden and Brittany's lives.

A Young Family Faces Unnecessary Intrusion **Kaden and Brittany**

Kaden and his wife Brittany started dating as teenagers, when they both worked at a restaurant in Rochester. At first they were just close friends, sharing details of their lives in frequent conversations. Then love began to blossom.

“He got very flirtatious,” Brittany recalls, although Kaden remembers it differently.

“I don’t flirt,” he says, smirking.

Six years later, Kaden and Brittany are married and living in Strafford County. Their family includes their three-year-old son, Andon*, and their nephew Joshua*, also three. They assumed legal guardianship of Joshua because his parents are unable to take care of him right now. (*The couple asked that the children’s real names be withheld to protect their privacy.)

“They’re inseparable,” says Brittany. “Sometimes they can’t stand each other when they’re together, but when they’re away from each other they’re like, ‘Where’s Josh?’ ‘Where’s Andon?’ They miss each other so much.”

In addition to raising their family, Kaden, 24, and Brittany, 22, are both continuing their education. Brittany is applying to local colleges to work with special needs high school students. Kaden is studying healthcare administration and psychology through online courses at Ashford University.

Their joys and struggles are similar to those of other young families—balancing studies and childrearing, maintaining financial stability, finding time to socialize with friends.

But they have faced unique challenges because Kaden is transgender. He began his transition when he was 15. And while they feel that overall New Hampshire is an accepting environment for their family, Kaden and Brittany have both been subjected to invasive and inappropriate personal questions and other harassing behavior in the workplace related to Kaden's transgender status.

Kaden was working at a local hotel where an employee familiar

**41% of transgender people report
having been asked inappropriate
questions about their
transgender or surgical status**

with his family began gossiping about him being transgender. The chatter resulted in a co-worker asking Kaden—in the presence of another co-worker—a very inappropriate question about his anatomy, using vulgar terminology. A stunned Kaden reported the interaction to his manager, who allowed him to leave work early that day. There was no substantive follow-up with Kaden afterward, nor was the offending employee disciplined. “It made everything so much more awkward after,” he says of the incident. He left the job a few months later under unrelated circumstances.

“It’s kind of a shock,” Kaden says of the invasive questions. “It’s been like nine years since I started [transitioning] and I don’t think I’ve actually gotten accustomed to people asking questions.”

At a subsequent job, a co-worker who learned he is transgender outed Kaden to his manager, violating his privacy. Despite the fact that his transgender status had no bearing on his job duties or performance, the manager approached Kaden with an unsolicited warning: though it wasn't a problem to her, Kaden shouldn't disclose his status to anyone in the corporate administration, "because she didn't think that they would be okay with it." Feeling anxious knowing his workplace was not supportive, Kaden resigned from the job shortly after.

Brittany worked at a large collection agency, alongside friends and family members who knew Kaden is transgender. One day, a supervisor and another employee approached Brittany at her desk—where she kept a photo of Kaden—and commented on how young he looked. After walking away, the supervisor told the employee that Kaden is transgender. That same employee later approached Brittany on more than one occasion asking questions of a sexual nature about her and Kaden.

"It was just horrible," Brittany says.

Kaden feels that to advance laws that protect transgender people from discrimination, people first need to learn more about the transgender community.

"I think education is the most important part to get anything done," he says. ♦

Transgender people are
twice more likely
than the national rate to be
unemployed

90% of transgender people
report having experienced
harassment, mistreatment or
discrimination in a job



Jen's family's support for their transgender child brings about positive changes.

Letting a Child Be **Jen and Her Family**

April recalls the dramatic change in her eight-year-old son Jon's behavior when he was finally able to show the world the child he knows himself to be: Jen, a little girl.

"Amazing," says April. "Day and night. Complete transformation."

Jen was named Student of the Month at her southern New Hampshire elementary school and earned her highest grade ever—a 90—on a spelling test. She now has a closer, more loving relationship with her older sister Kendall.

As Jon, the second-grader was unpredictable and sought negative attention. April routinely received three to four calls daily from the school about behavioral issues like overturning desks and acting aggressively toward classmates. At home he told outrageous lies rather than admit to his negative behavior. He and Kendall could barely stand the sight of each other.

"He was so confused and so insecure," recalls Leona, the child's grandmother. "He was just upset constantly."

Jon's transformation to Jen has been a long process. Adopted

at age five from the foster care system along with younger sister Dorothy, Jon exhibited feminine mannerisms, preferred Dorothy's toys, and pleaded to wear girl's outfits. When April and Leona took the children to buy new outfits for the day their adoptions were finalized, Jon went to the dress racks. Though he settled for a purple tuxedo, Jon looked uncomfortable and unhappy in photos from the day.

Eventually, April allowed Jon to dress as a girl at home, and they noticed his behavior improved dramatically.

When a therapist doing post-adoption counseling with the family learned about Jon's cross-gender behavior, he referred the family to therapists who specialized in gender issues. April and Leona began researching transgender kids, and saw Jon's pattern of behavior reflected in the stories they read online. April realized that she needed to let Jon be Jen.

Jen is now seeing a psychologist who specializes in treating transgender children and who diagnosed Jen with Gender Identity Disorder.

Her social transition at school began with a few articles of feminine attire here and there—girl's sneakers with a pair of earrings, a girl's shirt cloaked in a boy's sweater, colored fingernail polish.

**51% of transgender people
report having been
harassed or bullied while in school**

Last November, April explained Jen's situation to school officials and arranged for her to return to school after the winter vacation presenting fully as a girl. Jen's teacher was supportive. For the first week, says Leona, "Jen was on cloud nine. A perfect week at school, no behaviors at all, coming home just as happy as a lark."

But when another student's parent complained about Jen using the girls' bathroom, the principal told April that Jen would be

required to use a staff bathroom. April resisted the change, fearing the stigma of being treated differently from her peers would be detrimental to Jen, but the school was adamant. When April picked her up from school Jen was upset that she was forbidden to use the girl's room at school. She told her mother, "The principal said I was making the other kids uncomfortable." She later asked, "Can I just have my penis cut off, so people will like me?" April and Leona were devastated, and their concerns mounted when Jen began engaging in self-abusive behavior.

April eventually sought legal advice, and was able to reach a settlement with the school district that will hopefully allow Jen to reach her full educational potential. The district provided home tutoring for Jen for the remainder of the 2011-2012 school year. In the fall, she will enroll in third grade at a new school where her female gender identity will be affirmed and she will be treated the same as all female students in every aspect of the school setting for as long as she remains a student in the district.

April is hopeful that things will go well for Jen when she returns to the classroom.

"I just want her to be how she is at home, at school—that comfortable," says April. "And she should be. She should be allowed to be who she is." ♦

Family acceptance is strongly connected with a range of **positive outcomes**.

Transgender people who report having been **rejected by family** are more than **twice as likely** to be **homeless**, do **sex work**, or commit **suicide**, compared to those who report having been accepted by their family members.



Understanding the difficulties of being transgender, Matt Aversa tries to educate others.

A More Fulfilling Life **Matt Aversa**

Matt Aversa is a military veteran and a licensed social worker. While he makes his home in Southern New Hampshire, he works in a new LGBT unit at a mental health and addiction treatment center in a neighboring state. Away from work, Matt, 61, enjoys biking, kayaking and volunteer work. He's also a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Keene, and has given talks aimed at educating the UUC community about the joys and struggles of being a transgender man.

But life wasn't always this fulfilling for Matt. Living as a woman, he struggled for 10 years with debilitating depression, and neither he nor a succession of therapists could identify the root cause. Eventually, a determined therapist directed him to the International Foundation for Gender Education, an organization that promotes the acceptance of transgender people. "Thank God she did, because

it was the thing that saved me,” Matt says. “I didn’t know anything about being transgender. But once I started to find out and I realized this is why I felt the way I did, the depression went away. I never had a problem with it anymore.”

He transitioned to living as a man 15 years ago. Since then Matt has lived his life in relative peace, blending into his community and society unrecognizable as a transgender man.

But there have been difficulties. His parents initially refused to accept him when he came out as transgender, and asked him to leave their house. Several years ago Matt accepted a position at a VA medical center, where a co-worker with whom he had prior conflicts inadvertently learned that he is transgender and outed him to another employee, although his transgender status had no bearing on his ability to do his job. This violation of his privacy forced Matt to resign. “I just said, I’m done,” he recalls. “I don’t want to do this anymore because I just can’t take that kind of stress.”

Over half (53%) of transgender people report having been verbally harassed or disrespected in a place of public accommodation

And while he feels relatively safe walking the streets of his hometown because he is not identifiable as a transgender person, Matt does live with some fear of the wrong people finding out he’s transgender. “I’ve been in groups of men who are very homophobic and I’ve heard what they say,” he says. “So I’m sure if they knew that I was transgender, they’d probably either beat me up or something [worse], because if they say horrible things about gay men, I’m sure that it would be even worse with transgender folks.”

Matt continues to work to educate the community about LGBT issues and recently appeared on a television program shown locally in the Keene area. ♦



Linda Wilson never dreamed her life could be so fulfilling, but her workplace complicates it.

Sometimes I've Got to Pinch Myself **Linda Wilson**

Linda Wilson* and her partner, Anne* enjoy entertaining their large circle of friends at their home near Concord. In June they hosted a lobster cookout; a few weeks later, the couple welcomed guests for a Fourth of July celebration. Many of their friends attend the same Concord church that they do.

Linda, (*who asked that her and Anne's real names be withheld because of privacy concerns), joined the church nine years ago, after she began the process of transitioning when she was in her late fifties. She immediately found a welcoming and accepting congregation and a community that she embraced enthusiastically, including holding a leadership position. "That part of my life has been enriched beyond anything I had hoped for," Linda says. Perhaps not surprisingly, the church is where she and Anne first met, back in January of 2011.

Now in her early sixties, Linda describes her transition as a journey. There were many lonely years of hiding who she really was, but with the help of a therapist—and the support of friends—she has become comfortable living her life openly as the woman she knows herself to

be. Two years ago, Linda began receiving medical treatment to help her body better conform to her female gender identity. Her life, she says, is much more fulfilling now.

“Since I started being myself, being comfortable, being very happy, the relationships I had have deepened,” says Linda, “and I’ve been welcomed into the female circle. It’s terrific.”

For the past nine years, Linda has held a marketing position with a small technology company. It’s a job that she loves and at which she excels, and it pays well. But while many of her colleagues know Linda is transgender and it is not an issue for them, she feels she has to wear male attire and use a male name in the workplace out of concern she will jeopardize her employment and her financial security, a risk she’s not willing to take at her age.

“If I were 45-years old it would be a whole different story,” she says.

Her fear is not unfounded given that many transgender people are either fired or not hired for jobs simply because they are transgender. Nonetheless, she did not arrive at this decision lightly, doing so with the support of her therapist.

**71% of transgender people report
having hid their gender transition at
work to avoid discrimination**

“It’s a very complicated situation. There’s a lot of dynamics to it,” says Linda.

“I do keep a low profile,” she says of her workplace demeanor. “I don’t put [being transgender] in front of anybody because that’s not the point. I do function, other than that, one-hundred percent as a transgender person.”

That—and Anne—have improved Linda’s sense of happiness and well-being to a degree she never imagined. “Sometimes I’ve got to pinch myself,” she says. ♦



Drew Carson knows his transition has been easier than it is for most transgender people.

A Lucky Man **Drew Carson**

“A ship in the harbor is safe, but that’s not what ships are built for.” “It takes great courage to grow up to be the person you were meant to be.” Sayings like these are meant to inspire, but for a long time, whenever Drew Carson heard or read them they simply reminded him that he wasn’t living an authentic life.

It wasn’t until the 44-year-old Wakefield resident resolved longstanding questions about his gender identity, and began transitioning, that the nagging feeling there was something else he should be doing disappeared. “Now I feel lighter, like that sense of impending regret is completely gone,” Drew says. The general anxiety he was diagnosed with years ago has also notably decreased.

Drew is a Child Support Officer for the state of New Hampshire, a job he began recently after 10 years at the nonprofit Second Start.

The timing of his employment change wasn’t ideal, since he had just decided to begin a course of medical treatment to help his body better conform to his male gender identity. He was forced into the job market when Second Start was underbid for a state contract last

February. “I was pretty freaked out at the prospect of job searching so early in my transition, but I’m happy to report that I found a new job right away,” Drew says. “It was a relief to not be out of work as so many folks are.”

He’s also relieved that his transgender status is largely a non-issue at work. “In general people are very respectful and treat me as a male co-worker,” he says.

In 2011, Drew married his partner of 16 years, Cindy. “To me our relationship is even better because I am a happier person,” he says of the impact his transition has had on their bond.

The couple still enjoys working on their house, showering attention on their cats Mingus and Pearl, hiking and kayaking. Drew is continuing his quest to visit all of northern New England’s classic diners; he still loves the arts, music and antiques.

**45% of transgender people report
that their relationships ended
when they came out to partners**

He is also embracing life as a transgender man. Drew is more inspired to take care of his body, because of the prospect of developing the physique he’s long wanted. He is negotiating a new set of social standards with old friends: should he shake hands or hug male friends now? Hold doors or offer to carry heavy things for female friends? The answers vary depending on the friends. Drew’s primary frustration with transition is the slow development of masculine characteristics—like facial hair and a deeper voice—that come with taking male hormones, which he believes contributes to recurring instances in which he’s referred to with female pronouns.

“I definitely still have days where I’m aggravated about pronouns or I’m impatient about how slow some of the physical changes seem to be,” Drew acknowledges.

Aside from Cindy, his mother has been a great source of support through his transition. She sent a list of male names she liked when Drew decided to change his name, and offered financial support for medical care related to his transition. She is educating herself by reading memoirs by transgender men Chaz Bono and Matt Kailey.

He is aware that his transition and his life as a transgender man have been easier than for many transgender people.

“I grew up middle class with the expectation and finances to go to college and grad school, to work in a professional job with health insurance, to save money,” he says.

Drew also had the resources to pay for expensive transition-related medical care, which enabled him to legally change his identity documents to reflect that he is male. Those documents made his job search easier and prevent unnecessary scrutiny or confusion from government agencies, police, or in other situations where he must provide identification. Such access to proper documentation is out of reach for many transgender people due to discriminatory and outdated state policies requiring surgery.

Having consistent documents, Drew points out, “makes a huge difference in navigating the world as myself—it gives me the legal back up that many transgender people do not have.” ♦

Only **21%** of transgender people who **have transitioned** report having been able to update **all** of their **IDs and records** with their new gender

A growing number of states, including **Rhode Island**, **Massachusetts**, and **Maine**, have **removed** any **surgical requirements** for changing sex on a driver's license.

New Hampshire has **not**.



Megan Tracy remains optimistic despite the challenges she faces because she is transgender.

Breathing Easier, Despite Discrimination **Megan Tracy**

Megan Tracy remembers vividly the very first time she wore a dress, even though it was nearly 45 years ago. Just three years old, she snuck into her older sister Laurie's bedroom and spotted a red corduroy farmer's dress with a big pocket adorned with an anchor.

"I put the dress on and looked in the mirror," she recalls. "It felt like I had been holding my breath and then started breathing." Wanting to share her good feelings, she went downstairs exclaiming, "Ta Da!" Her mother stared. Laurie ripped off the dress.

Their shock stemmed from the fact that Megan was born a boy; the sight of their son and brother in girl's clothing was anathema.

Megan continued to secretly dress in girls' clothes whenever she got the chance. Eventually, her other sisters—Megan has 19 siblings—began dressing her up as part of what they saw as a game. One day when she was about six, she asked to go out and play in her girls' outfit with her best friends Bert and Bobby. Bobby spit on her. Bert beat her up. Megan says she learned a valuable lesson that day:

“Not everybody’s receptive.”

While watching a talk show when she was 11, Megan learned a word that explained everything she was feeling: transsexual.

That knowledge didn’t lessen her struggle, and Megan overcompensated for her feelings. She picked fights with other kids. In high school she acted macho, and engaged in substance abuse and self-mutilation. Megan also became deeply depressed.

At 16, her mother discovered her dressed as a female and asked if she wanted a gender change.

“I so badly wanted to say yes, but I looked at her, and the pain in her eyes,” Megan recalls. “I said, ‘This is just a Halloween costume.’ I fought like hell to be normal.”

Her first marriage ended because her wife could not abide Megan’s need to express her female gender identity. It was Megan’s second wife who encouraged her to be true to herself, for the sake of their son. “She told me I can’t be a decent parent if I can’t take care of myself,” Megan says. Though the couple divorced, they remain friends.

29% of transgender people with children report having experienced an ex-partner limiting their contact with their children

It’s been 14 years since Megan transitioned to live full time as the woman she’s long known herself to be. She has a good relationship with her son, now 17. Though she continues to struggle with depression, Megan says, “I’m happier than I was. Everybody’s got to start somewhere.”

She’s more at peace since her transition, but there have been costs. Megan is estranged from her daughter. She was threatened with arrest for using the women’s restroom at a local Wal-Mart, and

prohibited from using the women's room at the college where she earned her paralegal degree. She once had a can of beer hurled at her from a passing car while walking down the street in Concord, her home; a police officer who witnessed the assault did nothing.

"It hurts," Megan says. "Sometimes it's very, very difficult to be true to your convictions when so many people are against you."

She is hopeful the New Hampshire legislature will add protections for transgender people to existing civil rights laws, so she and others can live free from the harassment and discrimination they face just because of who they are. "We're not asking for anything more—or less," she says. "Just the same protections as everyone else." ♦

20% of transgender people
report having been
denied access to appropriate
bathroom facilities
while attending **college**



Bolstered by his wife's love and support, Mason Dunn is coming into his own.

I Always Had a Team by My Side **Mason Dunn**

Mason Dunn is a recent graduate of UNH School of Law. His passion is civil rights law; he would like to be an advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. But he's also looking forward to teaching a course this fall at UNH Manchester on LGBT images and perspectives in the media.

"Education is my other passion," says Mason, an adjunct faculty member. "I'd really love to be an educator as well as a lawyer."

Mason lives in Hooksett with his wife of four years, Lauren Willford, a sign language interpreter for a local school district. "I hate to use the word 'traditional,'" he says, "but we're very much an average married couple." Their Jewish faith is an important part of their life together, and they will soon be members of a synagogue in Concord. "The rabbi there is phenomenal and the entire community are really just good people," Mason explains. "We're really looking forward to getting more involved."

Mason came out as transgender around 2004 and spent the next several years exploring his more masculine gender identity. "I didn't want to be rushed into one box or the other," he says. After several years

of “straddling the gender line,” in 2011 Mason began the process of transitioning to live his life as a male, including seeking medical treatment to give him more male attributes.

Lauren’s loving support was critical in what Mason calls his “journey through gender.” It was something they discussed openly as he grappled with the difficult decision of whether or not to undergo gender transition.

“We approached this as a team, and I never felt alone because of that,” he adds. “I know a lot of transgender people feel very alone in their transition but I have been blessed because I always had a team by my side with my wife.”

While his life has improved because of his gender transition, he still faces difficulties in New Hampshire. For instance, at the time of this writing Mason cannot legally change the gender marker on his driver’s license—his primary form of identification—from female to male, which forces him to come out as transgender every time he must show identification, potentially exposing him to discrimination and even violence.

**40% of transgender people
report that when they presented ID
that did not match their gender
presentation, they were harassed**

Mason is also concerned that there is a great deal of ignorance in New Hampshire about the transgender community. “People don’t really know about trans identity,” he says, adding that that’s true “in the medical community, in the psychiatric community and sometimes in the legal community as well.”

Yet Mason remains hopeful that with education, greater acceptance will come. “I don’t see it as hatred so much as a lack of understanding,” he says, “and, given the opportunity, if people learn more about trans identities, specifically in the state of New Hampshire, I think that will change.” ♦



A supportive employer made a huge difference for Cynthia Tebbetts.

A Lifesaving Decision **Cynthia Tebbetts**

Cynthia Tebbetts is a die-hard, lifelong Beatles fan. Both her email address and her car license plate bear the name “sgtppr” in appreciation of the Fab Four’s iconic album. She is named for John Lennon’s first wife—a name she chose for herself.

“I eat, drink and sleep the Beatles,” says the 48-year-old Goffstown resident, who was seized by Beatlemania thanks to an older brother who was an avid music fan.

So who’s her favorite? “George would be right up there,” Cynthia replies. “George was the quiet one, but was also known for his sharp humor when you least expected it. He never got the credit John and Paul did, but he was the backbone of the band.”

Despite her devotion to the Beatles, Cynthia does find time for other pursuits. She’s worked in sales and customer service at Hooksett’s Cummings Printing for 25 years. She’s a huge Bruins

fan, volunteers at a local animal shelter (preferring cats to dogs), and has been involved with modified auto racing since 1980. She retired as race director for the Northeastern Midget Association in 2007, but remains active in the community.

In fact, when she traveled to Canada to undergo gender reassignment surgery in 2008, Cynthia was accompanied by a group of women—dubbed the “Mod Chick Mafia”—she met through their mutual love of racing. Their journey was chronicled by the *Nashua Telegraph* as part of an award-winning series of stories on the transgender community.

The support she received from the Mod Chick Mafia reflects the broader support Cynthia, a libertarian-leaning Republican, received from people in her social circle. “My friends who were the staunchest conservatives—the ones who are more conservative than I, the ones I thought for sure I was going to lose—are the ones who stuck by me,” she says.

Cynthia’s transition came after decades of struggling to suppress her female gender identity. She told the *Telegraph*, “This is the best decision I’ve ever made in my life. It literally has saved my life.”

**78% of transgender people
who are living full-time in accordance
with their gender identity report that
they feel more comfortable and their
performance improved at work**

Cynthia has found tremendous support in her professional life as well as in her personal life. She recalls how the president of her company responded when she began transitioning from male to female more than six years ago. They agreed there might be some good natured teasing, which Cynthia anticipated. “If people

stopped teasing me, then I'd know something's wrong," she says. But the president also told her, "If anybody crosses the line, I want to know and I want to know immediately." She learned later that he said the same thing to the vice president of the company.

From there, Cynthia worked with her employer to develop a timeline enabling her to transition gradually, beginning with the use of her chosen name and ending with her presenting full-time on the job as a woman.

"It was euphoria," she says, when asked how she felt about the response from the higher-ups at Cummings. "A huge pressure off my shoulders."

She adds, "When the company you've worked for and been loyal to for 20 years stands behind you, that's a big help because you really don't want to start from square one." ♦

55% of transgender people
report having
lost a job due to **bias**

Transgender Defined

A Glossary of Terms

Sex: The classification of people as male or female. Although at birth, infants are typically assigned a sex based on a visual assessment of their genitals, the more informed view of determining sex takes into account a combination of characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs, primary and secondary sex characteristics, and gender identity. While some use the term “gender” to refer to socially prescribed characteristics associated with maleness or femaleness (as distinct from physiologic characteristics), the terms “gender” and “sex” are more typically used interchangeably.

Gender Identity: One’s internal, personal sense of their gender as male, female, both or neither. For a transgender person, one’s assigned sex at birth is typically different than one’s gender identity.

Gender Expression: The external manifestation of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through “masculine,” “feminine,” or other gendered behavior, appearance, or other characteristics. It could include one’s clothing, hair style, and voice. Typically, transgender people seek to make their gender expression match their gender identity, rather than their birth-assigned sex.

Sexual Orientation: Describes an individual’s enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to another person. Like non-transgender people, transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual or asexual.

Transgender: A term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term may include but is not limited to: transsexuals, cross-dressers and other gender-variant people. Transgender people may identify as female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF).

Transsexual: A term that originated in the medical and psychological communities to describe an individual who undergoes a medical process of gender transition to live her/his life in a sex that is different than the one assigned at birth. Many transsexual people identify as transgender.

Gender Transition: The personal process in which a person begins to openly identify and live consistent with her/his gender identity, as opposed to her/his birth sex. For some transgender people, gender transition is a medically necessary process that is done under medical and mental health supervision. It can include changing one's name, changing one's gender presentation, hormone therapy and any one of a range of surgeries.

Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS): Surgical procedures for the purposes of gender transition, including but not limited to genital surgeries (removal and constructive), facial feminization surgery, mastectomy and chest reconstructive surgeries. Not all transgender people require or can afford to have SRS.

Cross-Dressing: To occasionally wear clothes traditionally associated with people of the other sex. People who cross-dress are often comfortable with the sex they were assigned at birth and do not wish to change it, in contrast with someone who has transitioned to live full-time as the other sex or who intends to do so in the future.

Gender Identity Disorder (GID): A medical diagnosis given to some transgender and gender-variant adults and children to describe the significant distress that some individuals experience due to the mismatch between their birth sex and their gender identity. GID can be a serious medical condition that may require medical care and treatment, including medically supervised gender transition.

Adapted from information provided by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition

Take Action

Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD) and TransGender New Hampshire (TG-NH) are part of a state-wide coalition working to establish anti-discrimination protections for all transgender New Hampshire residents. One important step in getting these legal protections passed is educating New Hampshire legislators and the public about transgender people's lives.

YOU CAN HELP

- **Share this book** with your family, friends, neighbors and legislators
- Visit www.glad.org/nh-stories to share your own story
- Visit www.tgnh.org for resources and support, or to volunteer with the organization

IF YOU BELIEVE YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION

Contact GLAD's **Legal InfoLine** to report the situation and receive free, confidential legal information and referrals

Call **800-455-GLAD (4523) Mon-Fri 1:30-4:30 p.m.**

Email us at www.glad.org/rights anytime

GLAD is New England's leading legal rights organization dedicated to ending discrimination based on sexual orientation, HIV status and gender identity and expression.

TG-NH promotes transgender visibility, education, support and civil rights in the state of New Hampshire. TG-NH provides resources, community building, educational programs and advocacy to assist transgender NH residents, as well as significant others, friends, families, allies and helping professionals.

All of the facts and statistics listed in this book are from
**Injustice at Every Turn:
A Report of the
National Transgender
Discrimination Survey**
by the National Gay and Lesbian
Task Force.

For more information, visit
**[www.thetaskforce.org/
reports_and_research/ntds](http://www.thetaskforce.org/reports_and_research/ntds)**

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