

Bio of Jessica McKinnon and introduction of Jamison Green - 12/1/2006

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Jessica McKinnon. Being included on this panel of speakers today is a very special opportunity for me. I am a pre-operative male to female transsexual. Like many transsexuals, for most of my life, I always felt that there was something wrong, and always felt more like a girl than a boy, as much as I tried to convince myself that such feelings were wrong. After more than 20 years of confusion and frustration, I finally started reading up on the subject and felt a lot more normal after listening to many well-known figures within the transgender community, such as Jamison Green.

A year and a half ago, I made the conscious decision to go forward with transitioning and started living part time (outside of work) as a woman. My life has been very stressful since then, trying to concentrate on my work, all the while learning the social conditioning that girls learn during their childhood and teen years, coming out to my family and friends and even having to come to terms with my life partner falling in love with someone else, ultimately deciding to go our separate ways, but have remained good friends to this day. About a year ago, I started psychotherapy and facial hair removal, thus starting my more formal transition, and as time progressed, my situation became more and more difficult to cope with, making it very difficult for me to maintain composure (still as a man) at work, pretending as though nothing had changed. So I finally came out to HR at work early this year and began planning to start living full time as a woman (work included) from the middle of the year. I am very fortunate to be working for a very diverse and inclusive company that has allowed me to transition within my position as a software engineer at an economic consulting firm in Washington, DC. I started hormone replacement therapy shortly before going full time, which has helped me significantly to feel more at home in my own body.

So July 1, 2006 was my big day, when I got to start living as Jessica full time, and I was finally free of all the pretense, lies and deception that had become an integral part of my life. That day also just happened to coincide with the arrival of my mom and sister visiting me on vacation from their homes overseas. I hadn't seen either of them for a few years, and that day was the first time that they finally got to meet me as Jessica, which coincidentally also became my new legal name during the course of their stay. Prior to that, it had been all talk over the phone. While they were still hesitant at first to accept the change, by the time their 10-day stay was up, they were a lot more comfortable about my decision. That experience educating them and many others during my transition so far has shown me that my calling is to help to break down the barriers that many of us face as transgender people.

My months of anxiety about transitioning at work instantly evaporated when my actual transition became one of the biggest non-events in the history of my company. It was like a dream come true. Most people simply took to the idea as if I had always been a girl at work, and many of them have told me that they struggle to remember what I was ever like as a guy. This gave me a huge boost to my confidence level, and it reinforced my thoughts about getting more involved in the community.

On September 21, 2006, some of you might have heard me being interviewed on a popular radio station's morning show, "Elliot in the Morning". I had merely called in to set the record straight on some misinformation by a previous caller. Seizing the opportunity, Elliot turned it into an impromptu 20-minute interview, which presented me with a unique opportunity to reach out to thousands of Americans to give them a glimpse into the life of a transitioning transsexual. I received a great deal of positive feedback from both within and outside of the transgender community, and have since taken on more responsibility within my support group, MAGIC (the Metro Area Gender Identity Connection).

I have never been happier than I have been the last few months, finally getting to live as "me". Don't get me wrong. It's a very hard road that takes a lot of courage and support of friends and loved ones to make it through.

I would now like to share a short, but significant anecdote with you. A couple of years ago, when I was still battling to figure out who and what I was, and before I even knew what the word "transsexual" meant, we were flipping through the channels on TV, looking for something interesting to watch. We just happened to stop flipping through channels when we came across a documentary dealing with gender identity and brain sex. It was fascinating, and I was completely dumbfounded when a transsexual man interviewed for the show was able to articulate almost exactly what I had been feeling since I was little. I remember even shedding a few tears as his words really hit home. It was those words that finally got me to start looking in the right places. I was so frustrated with life at that point that without hearing his words by accident that day, I really don't know if I would still be alive today. As a result, I have felt since then that I owed that very eloquent, and clearly very well educated man a debt of gratitude for saving my life, albeit completely unbeknownst to him.

And it is with that in mind, that I am extremely honored to have the pleasure of personally introducing you to a very compelling speaker, a well-respected leader within the transgender community, award-winning author of the book "Becoming a Visible Man", and, of course, the man who saved my life: Jamison Green.