

## Only son is now her daughter

**'Fighting who you are has got to be exhausting,' says mom who is struggling to accept gender**

**switch** Published By Diane Flacks Challenges "As a mother, you're only as happy as your saddest child," Sylvia says over the phone from her home in southwestern Ontario. She had no idea how unhappy her eldest child Jamie was. He covered so well. Jamie wasn't hiding a drug addiction or a gambling habit. Nor was he covering up his sexual orientation. Jamie was pretending to be someone he wasn't. Outside he was male. Inside, he wasn't. It took many years, but Jamie, 26, now identifies as female. She has been undergoing hormone therapy and is working with a voice teacher to elevate her vocal pitch. At six feet tall, Jamie is a striking and incisive young woman. "I can't believe I didn't do this sooner," she says. "I realize how strong my gender dissonance was. It's like when you have a loud noise and you don't realize how bad it was, and then when you turn it off, you're like, 'Wow, that was so loud.' Now I can hear things I never heard before." However, Jamie's decision has been difficult on her mother, Sylvia, who admits to spending a week in bed, in shock, when she first heard the news. She was not only mourning the loss of the son she had raised, but also struggling to imagine Jamie as her daughter. She was also concerned about the emotional toll Jamie's transition would have on her husband and her other two daughters, who were now two girls without a big brother, but with a big sister instead. She discovered that one daughter had known about Jamie's struggle for a year, and had never said anything. "My heart bled for her, keeping this secret all that time." She still worries about Jamie's safety, even agonizing over her decision to participate in this article and pose for the photo. In the end, she asked that their surname be protected, even though Jamie has no similar apprehension. "My gravest concern (initially) was that Jamie might not be making the right choice," Sylvia says, fearing that she was getting the wrong medical and psychological advice. She now sees that Jamie had no choice. Jamie agrees. She says life would have been much easier, if she could have continued living as a man. But even when she was young, she knew something wasn't right. "I thought every guy just secretly wished they were girls. The behaviour of men always seemed so put on, as if they were trying to compensate for something. I just tried to be what I thought a good boy or man was."

And she succeeded. She had many friends, girlfriends and was athletic – even becoming one of Ontario's top male cyclists. Although Jamie is happy with her new gender, there are other parts of her identity that she has lost. She's not sure she will return to competitive cycling – a sport she's shared with her dad since she was 11. According to the Ontario Cycling Association, Jamie can't race competitively as a woman until two years after sexual reassignment surgery – a complex procedure she still hasn't decided she wants to go through. Jamie had been deeply worried that she would lose the respect of her friends and co-workers as a trans person. Instead, she says many people respect her more for fighting to be who she really is. She works in a supportive environment at IBM, and is interested in pursuing a music degree – she is a self-taught violinist. Sexual orientation and gender orientation are two separate things. Jamie's gender identity is now female, but her sexual orientation has not changed. She had girlfriends before, and now, she also has a girlfriend. "I never thought I'd grow up to be a lesbian," she quips. Jamie first tried to come out as trans when she was 17. It did not go well with her family, so she tried to "make it go away." But at the age of 25, she reached a breaking point. "We finally got the message last Christmas when Jamie said, 'I have to come home as a female or I can't come home for Christmas,'" her mother recalls. "We wanted Jamie home, but we weren't sure we were ready for a female Jamie." Now, six months later, Sylvia can see that the transition has liberated Jamie – who, she notices, has more friends, more energy. "Fighting who you are has got to be exhausting," she says, adding she can empathize. "Before I told friends and family, we felt like we were phonies, covering up this family secret. Now, I feel freer. "I was in a meeting and somebody asked me how many children I had, and I said I have three girls. For me, that was major. As time goes on, it will get easier."

