

I am five years old. I have just gone to my mom to ask that she not make me wear dresses anymore, because “dogs don’t wear dresses and boys don’t wear dresses and when I am playing with my friends I am always a dog or a boy.” I always play John Smith when my friends and I are playing make-believe with Disney characters. I want to look like John Smith when I grow up.

I am twelve years old. Oregon Measure 36 has just passed. I am aware that I am different, and that my rights are less important than the comfort of “normal” people; bumper stickers and yard signs all over Deschutes County have informed me of this. I am aware that being gay is a sin, because that’s what the bumper stickers say and that’s what the people on the TV say, but I am confused because the nice ladies across the street are Christians and I’m pretty sure that they’re in love with each other. We just had Thanksgiving with two family friends who were married and now the state says that they’re not. I am confused and sad, and my mom has been very quiet lately.

I am thirteen years old. I am sitting in a hair stylist’s chair, clutching a magazine photo of a musician that I really like. I’ve just had my hair cut short for the first time. I can’t understand why I don’t look like my favorite rock star, I just look like a girl with short hair. I get better results a year later, when I shave my hair into a mohawk - I keep the mohawk for a long time.

I am fourteen years old and my friend Olivia kisses me behind the music building. It is the first time a girl has ever kissed me. She tells me, “I wish you were a boy. You would be the best boyfriend.” I feel upset and I don’t understand why. I won’t fully understand for a long time.

I am seventeen years old and I discover the Cliks, and I find out what the word “transgender” means. I spend hours looking at pictures and videos of the lead singer of the Cliks online. Two of my friends come out as trans, one right after the other, and I think to

myself that it must be really nice to have such a solid idea of who you are. I am still missing all the clues. I am still convinced that I'm a girl. People frequently use the word "tomboy" when talking about me. I am told I would be much prettier if I wore makeup.

I am twenty four years old and my transgender boyfriend is helping me pick out a chest binder. When it arrives, I put it on immediately. As I button a shirt over it, a sense of rightness settles around my shoulders like a cloak. I feel more like myself than I have in years, maybe ever. This is, in many ways, the beginning. I spend more and more time on the internet, connecting with transmasculine people and putting the pieces together. I am scared, but I no longer feel suffocated.

I am now thirty years old. I am a tattoo artist, having left the medical field after a career-ending spinal injury. I am openly queer. I am openly transgender. I have been on testosterone for several years now, and I have a consult for top surgery in June. I have "LOST BOY" tattooed across my knuckles, and for the first time in my life I feel like I've become the person I was always supposed to be.

In my adolescence and emerging adulthood, I spent a lot of time deliberately turning away from that still small voice. When I finally sat with myself and leaned into the discomfort, I discovered that I was enough - I was strong enough, and brave enough, to face what was coming and to become the person I needed to be. But over the last several years, the world has gotten darker and scarier for people like me. More and more anti-LGBTQ+ legislation has been being introduced, more and more politicians are saying the quiet part loud. More and more elected officials are failing to protect us.

I've only just found myself. I'm not going anywhere. We have always been here — if you look closely enough, queer and transgender people have been present at every point in history. We cannot be legislated out of existence. But across the United States, we are seeing a coordinated agenda to attempt to do exactly that — forced detransitioning (of adolescents

and adults alike) is an attempt to snuff us out like a candle. It won't work, it never does... but a lot of us will die if this kind of legislation continues unchecked.

Oregon has a chance to right the wrong that was done in the passage of Measure 36. We have a chance to protect Oregonians, to ensure that our LGBTQ+ children grow up in a world where they feel safe to be themselves. We owe it to ourselves to constitutionalize these rights, these protections. We owe it to ourselves to pave the way to a brighter future. I urge you to include this proposed amendment on the ballot.