

Life Story: Munir van Reenen

My name is Munir and I am a 33-year-old trans man. I knew I was different before the age of ten because I did not "act like a girl". I did everything the boys did, like running around without a t-shirt, playing with boys and boy's toys. I was definitely different.

My father died when I was a baby and my mom never reprimanded me or ever told me I was a girl and should act like a girl. She bought me what I wanted in terms of clothes and toys. The boys also just accepted me as part of the friendship circle.

As I grew older and into my teens, I started backing away from boys and started joining the girls' group because that was what was expected of me. Boys started showing an interest in me, but I was only interested in girls.

I never thought that it was possible to transition from female to male. I started out late and it was only because of a gynaecologist who did some research and came across information on transitioning that I learnt about being transgender. This was in 2008 and in 2009 I started seeing a sexologist working with transgender issues for the obligatory three months. I was invited to meet with the transgender panel at Groote Schuur Hospital. I then had top-surgery done and started taking testosterone.

My mom does not talk about my transition, but she is silently supportive. I have two sisters and a brother, who are all very accepting. My eldest sister, however, says that she will only stop trying to convince me not to go through with the transition once I have fully transitioned. The other sister is okay with it while my brother thinks it's "cool".

I do intend to go all the way with the transition process. When I went for the hysterectomy, I was very emotional and not very sure whether I wanted to go through with it. There was definitely a bit of doubt in my mind for a while.

I have an eight-year-old son, so do not worry too much about not being able to have a "normal" family. However, I do worry about future relationships and wonder how they would feel about the fact that they would never be able to have a child by me. I am not in a relationship at the moment.

In the beginning my ex-girlfriend and I was very excited about my transition. But as time went on, she drew away from me more and more. She had never been involved with a female before and could not get past the fact that I had been born a female.

There was also a girl I was chatting with on Mixit. At first that went well because she thought I was a biological male. When I told her the truth, she backed off, saying that she had never been involved with a woman before and couldn't get her head around the fact that I was still a woman. They did not understand about gender identity.

I never really experienced problems at my place of work. The company I was working for at the time accepted me as I presented and even allowed me to wear the male uniform and use the gentlemen's toilet. The director called a staff meeting and explained the situation. She also offered to answer any questions the staff may have.

My son is very involved in my life. When I first came out I explained things to him and also took him to see a therapist. But if at any point of my transition he wants me to stop I will. I think we underestimate children in what they understand and the way they see things. My son knows what's happening and at the present moment he accepts me just for what I am.

The future is not something I think about much. I try not to think ahead or about what might happen. One question I've always asked, though, is why I had to wait so many years before I finally got to hear about transgender and what transitioning entails. I hope that others like me will find the necessary information while they are young and not lose hope because they do not know where to go.