




Ad



Burst into a Great Deal! AAA Members
SAVE \$30 on weekly rentals

BOOK NOW



AdChoices

Local

Transgender at 6: For Tyler and his parents, no second thoughts

1 of 7



Advertisement

Andersen Door. 3l
Series 36 in. Terr
\$307

“I am a boy,” she insisted at age 2. It became a constant theme in struggles with her parents, who eventually concluded she wasn’t just a tomboy. Then, they had to figure out how to handle it.

--

Tyler, 5, gets a haircut in March in his family's Maryland home. His parents allowed him to present himself as a boy when he was 4, after he was diagnosed with gender identity disorder. The Washington Post took a number of steps to protect the identity of Tyler and his family, including not publishing details about where they live and go to church and school in the Washington area. We used only the middle names of Tyler's parents and sister to protect their privacy outside their community, where

their situation is widely known. Tyler's name in the story is the one his parents would have given him if he'd been born a boy. We are publishing photos of Tyler with his parents' permission. (Nikki Kahn/The Washington Post)



By **Petula Dvorak** Columnist July 11, 2013

Follow @petulad

Yes, Tyler is still a boy.

That's what people who heard about him have wondered.

Petula is a columnist for The Washington Post's local team who writes about homeless shelters, gun control, high heels, high school choirs, the politics of parenting, jails, abortion clinics, mayors, modern families, strip clubs and gas prices, among other things. [View Archive](#)

Facebook

Google+

After a Maryland couple decided to listen to their 5-year-old daughter's urgent and persistent insistence that she was a boy, after a psychiatrist told them it would be healthy to let the child live as a boy, after they let him pick a boy name and found a school that would enroll the child in kindergarten as a boy last year, Tyler's parents have had no second thoughts.

"It's not a phase," said his mother, Jean.

"Anyone who meets him says, 'Yeah, that's a boy.'"

It's only the people who have never met him who wonder.

This video from the Post's May 2012 profile shows Tyler at age 5, soon after his parents first allowed him to live as a boy. Now age 6, he shows no signs of wanting to be a girl again. (The Post is using the name his parents would have given him if he had been born a boy to protect the family's identity outside their community, where their situation already is widely known.) (Whitney Shefte/The Washington Post)

More than 18 months into the public switch, Tyler shows no signs of ever wanting to be Kathryn again.

I wrote about [the family's wrenching decision](#) and learning process last year. I walked with this family through some of the first steps it took in the public transition and watched throughout the year as the child blossomed and flourished in kindergarten. (The Washington Post decided to use family members' middle names and the name they would've given Kathryn if she had been born a boy [to protect their privacy](#).)

I can tell you from plenty of firsthand observation that Tyler is doing great.

"Come on! Let's play Batman!" he screamed to my younger son, his partner in crime on a recent play date. The two boys swam together, compared Lego guys and had sword fights.

Whenever the family watches television, Tyler roots for the boy characters.

His home looks like a house with a son. Karate gear, soccer balls, cars, trucks and pirate swords abound. At school, he's a boy. Plain and simple.

“It became a lot easier once the transition was done,” Jean said. “The dust settled, and everything is relatively easy now.”

At 6, Tyler is on the younger side of the transgender community. But that’s not because he is unusual. Most [transgender adults](#) say they knew from a very young age that they felt miscast in their bodies. And doctors agree that gender identity usually manifests between 3 and 6 years of age.

What’s different is that Tyler’s parents — both schoolteachers and coaches — decided to listen to their child. They ignored the family members who expressed shock and disbelief. They ignored the teasing from a neighborhood bully. They ignored the gossip among some co-workers.

Instead, Jean and Stephen let Tyler pick his name, his clothes and his toys. Instantly a happier, healthier child emerged from the surly preschooler who was always fighting over dresses and leotards and the word “she.”

Since I recounted their journey, Jean and Stephen have met seven other families in the area who have very young gender-variant kids.

They are starting an informal support group, linking all the families online to talk about things like school enrollment, sports, bathroom use — all the logistics that come with a switch at an early age.

Their current challenge is legally changing their child’s

name.

Tyler's father would like to take him and his older sister to see his homeland, outside the United States. But the idea of applying for a passport and traveling abroad with a girl's name and a boy's picture on a passport scares them to death. So they've decided to postpone any travel.

Advertisement

The gender change came up not long ago when Stephen took Tyler to a night pediatric clinic with a bad cough. Dad asked the staff to make the insurance claim out in the child's female name, since that's who is covered. But they didn't. And now their insurance company is eyeballing them for insurance fraud because of a claim made for a child who doesn't legally exist.

"So it's times like this, when it surprises you, and you deal with something new," Jean said.

To change his name legally, they face one big roadblock.

"In this county, they require you to publish a name change, to make sure no one contests it. That guarantees him no privacy," she said. So they are now pushing to allow a name change under a sealed document.

This is something courts will be seeing more of. Increasingly, kids like Tyler are gaining mainstream acceptance.

In May, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the nation's manual for mental health

diagnosis, eliminated the term “gender identity disorder” and replaced it with the less stigmatizing “gender dysphoria.”

But inclusion in the manual ensures that people like Tyler will have access to services — from counseling to medical procedures such as puberty blockers and gender reassignment surgery — if that’s what he wants as an adult.

His parents will have to find a doctor who will begin tracking him for signs of early puberty next year. And once there is a sign — they are a family of early bloomers, and that trait is genetic, Jean said — they will have to decide whether to begin giving him puberty blockers to stop breasts and curves from blooming.

Advertisement

But right now, Tyler is just 6. And although his parents stay awake at night worrying about what a transgender adolescence holds for them, the issues today are much simpler. Tyler enters the boy’s bathroom, but is instructed to always use a stall.

When he began asking for play dates, his mom wrestled a little bit with whether she is obligated to tell the other parents that under his clothes, Tyler looks like Kathryn. She decided that unless it’s a sleepover, she won’t.

Tyler has taken matters into his own hands on at least one occasion, Jean said, by telling a pal that he is transgender.

“Whatever,” the kid said, and they dived back into trucks

and light-saber play.

Through his sister, Tyler has access to all things girly and sparkly. So if the desire to identify, play or live as a girl ever struck Tyler, the opportunity is there.

But so far, no interest.

He wears boy clothes, makes boy friends and plays typical boy games. He gets mad when his sister tries to put makeup on him.

Yup, still a boy.

For previous columns, go to washingtonpost.com/dvorak.