

“Mom, I’m trans” - transcript

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Andrew’s Sister: Do you remember how you found out about Andrew being trans?

Andrew’s Mom: I can’t recall the specific moment or the circumstances, but I remember how it made me feel, I felt completely awful.

Sister: Why awful?

Mom: It was inconceivable to me, like, you don’t believe something like this could happen to you until it does.

[transition]

Andrew (voiceover): 2020. My sister is recording an interview with my mom for a school project.

[transition]

Sister: And you didn’t notice any signs before?

Mom: No.

Sister: Not even when he wanted to cut his hair when he was eleven or so?

Mom: Well, that wouldn’t have ever crossed my mind, I didn’t see it in that context, no. Back then I just felt upset that he wanted to cut his beautiful long hair, but it didn’t occur to me that that could be the reason.

[transition]

Andrew (voiceover): It was a few years after I had come out to my whole family as trans. At the time of the recording I was nineteen, nearly one year on hormones and preparing for chest masculinization surgery.

[transition]

Sister: And how do you see it in the present day?

Mom: The way I see it is, that I just have no choice but to come to terms with it. But it still makes me disappointed and sad.

Sister: And why does it make you sad, like...

Mom: Because it's as if the child I gave birth to doesn't exist anymore and... I just feel awful about the whole situation. I'm not sure if I could have done something differently or better... I just want our old life back, but I know that's not possible.

Sister: By that you mean...?

Mom: I mean back when I had three happy, sweet, daughters who were carefree and... We were happy back then even if we didn't know it. I've always wanted my children to be happy. If this meant that Andy would finally be happy then I'd be glad, but I'm not too sure that he is.

[transition]

Andrew (voiceover): My name is Andrew, I'm twenty three years old and I'm studying a field related to radio and television at university. Many parents of children who come out as trans can probably relate to the way my mom was feeling back then. During my transition a division came between me and my mom. I decided to attempt to breach this divide that often comes between young trans people and their parents with this documentary. Because every trans person's story is different, I also decided to include Sebastian, a young trans man who came out and transitioned slightly later than I did.

[transition]

Andrew: I'll just quickly put one earbud in my ear to hear what it sounds like but I probably won't have it in the whole time...

Sebastian: I'll try not to make any shuffling sounds...

Andrew: Yea, I think it's okay.

Sebastian: Okay so, my name is Sebastian, I'm nineteen years old, I live with my mom and sister in Prague, and I'm currently in my first year at the Faculty of Arts. I think I realized it gradually, at first I felt like something about me was different, then I realized that I probably like girls, so I was like: 'Okay, I guess I'm a lesbian, fine.' and it stopped weighing on me for a while. But on the other hand I still didn't experience that feeling of relief, like: 'Yea, this is it, I'm okay and I can function normally now.' Then it got worse, like my feelings of uncertainty and such. And then I somehow came across the topic and I started reading more about it, I think it was around the time I was thirteen or fourteen.

[transition]

Andrew (voiceover): Diary entry. July 17th, 2016. I wish I had a flat chest, real, real bad. I'm crazy, that could never happen, it's just a stupid pipe dream. I don't know why I keep hoping for it, I know I will never be able to take off my shirt in public. I'll always be seen

as a girl by everyone. I don't know what to do. Why is my family like this? Am I supposed to keep pretending until I die?

Andrew (voiceover): When I was about fourteen or fifteen, I realized I was trans. At first I had no hope of doing something about it, because I felt like my family would never accept me. It felt safer to not say anything for a while and seek support from my friends instead.

[transition]

Sebastian: My parents didn't show any signs of not being accepting, but the reason I couldn't tell them at the time was because, when you're like thirteen or fourteen and you tell your parents something like this and like, it goes south and doesn't work out, you might lose everything. You live with your parents, you share a household with them, it's not like realizing it as an adult when you already have your own life. At thirteen you might mess the situation up and then you're forced to live in it for a long time. I felt like I would be taking a huge risk, especially because I wasn't completely sure at the time.

[transition]

Mgr. Jiří Procházka: My name is Jiří Procházka and I am a counselor and a psychotherapist, I work in social services. The family's role is ambivalent because they're usually the people closest to the young person, they're the most important people in their life and so coming out to them puts them at a risk of rejection and losing support. Also, the younger a person is, the more likely they are to be dependent on their family when it comes to housing and finances and such. When I do counseling and therapy, I examine this with my clients, it's about finding the courage and the right way to let their family know.

[transition]

Sebastian: I ended up developing psychosomatic epilepsy, I spent one entire summer in the hospital, the whole thing was really awful, I also developed issues with food and such... I'd also experience panic attacks where I would completely shut down and stuff. Eventually I realized I can't keep repressing the things I've bottled up, because it was destroying me physically, like, it had a real effect on me, and so I ended up coming out to my parents...

[transition]

Sebastian's Mom (Šárka): My name is Šárka, I am from Prague and I am Sebastian's mom. Back when the epileptic seizures started, the first one happened when we were on vacation and it was really uncomfortable and painful, we had a really hard year because every seizure would turn day into night and night into day. Sebi was

experiencing fear and anxiety and I was really afraid for my child, I truly feared for his life...

Sebastian: One summer I cut off all of my hair on a whim and I remember I was sitting with my dad on the couch and all of a sudden he asked me: "So, what's your deal? Or like, what's going on, what is this about?", so he was the one who opened up the topic. I ended up telling him that I was feeling kind of confused, that I was having these feelings of not really being a girl, but telling a parent something like this is actually kind of weird, and I don't really remember what happened after I had said that, but I do remember this gave me a bit of courage and, because I kept a diary at the time, I decided that I would let my mom read it.

Sebastian's Mom (Šárka): After that we went on vacation where Sebi left his diary under my pillow with a note that said that he can't keep this in anymore and that I should read the diary. That's how he told me how he was feeling, that he feels that he is a boy and that's how the entire journey started. I knew that my heart was open and that I love my children unconditionally, but of course, accepting it wasn't completely easy. I was afraid, I had some concerns, but I hope that Sebi knows that back then I did my best with what I had at the moment.

[transition]

Andrew (voiceover): When I was sixteen I decided to come out, because I couldn't take it anymore, and I was hoping I would be able to transition so I could feel better.

Andrew (voiceover - Diary entry): March 12th, 2017. I just had *the* conversation with my mom. It was a mistake to bring it up. We argued. It went exactly like I was afraid it would go. Mom has 100+1 reasons why I'm not actually trans and why I'm not really a boy. ... I can't keep going like this, It's too much.

[transition]

Mgr. Jiří Procházka: Parents tend to be shocked or surprised by it and it usually takes them some time to get used to the situation. It's typical for them to try to find alternative reasons for why their child is struggling, it makes more sense to them that way, they might have biases or, similar to when a child is not straight, they might be afraid that their child will have a difficult life, or that their child might need surgery and so on. Parents may be afraid of supporting their child in making a decision that turns out to be a mistake, but that only creates pressure. When they are open to their child's identity and they accept it, it allows the child to explore it better and properly realize what they need, possibly being aided by a psychologist or therapist if necessary.

[transition]

Andrew (voiceover - Diary entry): March 17th, 2017. My session with the psychologist was surprisingly productive. I didn't expect her to understand. She gave me the number for a child sexologist. And most importantly she agreed to use my name! That gave me a new hope.

Andrew (voiceover): I ended up convincing my mom to take me to the sexologist after getting the recommendation. To my surprise she accepted the doctor's diagnosis and I started living as a boy, something the doctors call „the real life test”. After that I was able to change my name to a neutral, temporary name given to trans people before they are allowed to legally change their gender. Back then the only way to change legal gender was to get sterilized, so I wasn't yet allowed to change my name to the name that I wanted.

[transition]

Sebastian: When I got my first ID at fifteen, it already had my new name, that was actually the first thing I did. This also allowed me to start high school already out as a boy without having to come out to people and explain things... Basically me, my parents and my doctor agreed that I would go to all these different doctors and experience the medical examinations necessary to be able to get a hormone prescription. Eventually we came to the decision that I should start taking testosterone. That helped a lot, it made me feel much better and it was all that I imagined it would be. Things were getting better and I didn't feel the need to change anything else for a while.

Sebastian's Mom (Šárka): When it comes to how I was feeling, I was afraid of the responsibility, of being the person who gets to decide whether he starts hormone injections, or the person that gives permission to let him have breast surgery. That's what I was afraid of, but looking back I now know those feelings were selfish, but I couldn't help but have them.

[transition]

Andrew (voiceover): I went to the child sexologist from ages sixteen to eighteen and under his supervision I lived as a guy, however he didn't prescribe me any hormones. When it comes to transitioning, different doctors have different approaches and mine didn't want to prescribe hormones to an underage person. This time in my life was really painful, because I tried really hard to be seen as a guy and to be referred to by the correct pronouns, but most people only saw me as a girl because of how I looked. The discrepancy between how I was seen and how I wanted to be seen made my mental health worse and I became more withdrawn.

Andrew (voiceover): October 1st, 2017. I can't be around my family. They keep using the wrong pronouns. I don't open up to my mom that much anymore. Or at least I'm trying not to. I just feel like I can't trust her. Like she doesn't understand me.

[transition]

Andrew (voiceover): These days some people are alarmed by the fact that there are way more people identifying as transgender than there used to be. Some are concerned that most of those people who identify that way aren't actually trans and that there will be way more people going through something called 'detransition' in the future. That's when someone wants to reverse some or all of their transition for some reason.

Mgr. Jiří Procházka: There are concerns about the fact that there are more people who identify as trans. The rise in those numbers should mean that there would be more people who end up regretting it, who feel like they made a mistake, but that hasn't happened, the number of those people is very minimal. It's only a few percent of cases, and the cases when someone goes through all the procedures and changes their mind in the end are less than one percent.

[transition]

Sebastian's Mom (Šárka): I just had to have faith in him, I didn't have any other option. With Sebi's permission, I attended the sessions with his therapist - I'm really glad we came across this doctor back then - and I shared my questions and concerns with her. The doctor told me that this isn't some teenage rebellion, that it's a diagnosis and it won't go away, and that she knows that it's hard to accept something like this, but... I guess I just had to deal with the situation on my own.

Sebastian: Both of my parents were really pragmatic about it, basically that it's better to have a happy and healthy child than one that's totally struggling and I think my health played a big part in it. It helped them realize that this might be it, that it's worth pursuing.

[transition]

Andrew (voiceover): When I was eighteen I changed doctors and was given a prescription for hormones which finally caused me to feel better. When my sister was making the school project four years ago, she also recorded an interview with me. I was a few months on hormones back then.

[transition]

Sister: And what's it like to take the hormones? You've been taking them for...

Andrew: It's gonna be five months next week. The pills are like, well, the changes are more mild and it was only after I started the, the injections that, well, that's when things

started changing more. After the first injection I had a sore throat and then my voice dropped immediately after and such.

Sister: And how is it with your mental health recently?

Andrew: Well I knew that testosterone won't solve all my mental health problems, like I definitely didn't think that it would magically fix everything or something like that. There are a lot of things I have to get over, things that don't really have anything to do with me being trans, but for example since people started using male pronouns for me and such, like, all my suicidal thoughts vanished. And I feel more confident now and I feel much better and also I'm less shy about talking now, because before I used to hate my voice and didn't really want to talk sometimes. And whenever someone called me miss or ma'am, I just felt like, like really awful. And nowadays even strangers call me by male pronouns and such so that's gotten better. I used to get these panic attacks when I'd look in the mirror sometimes and I don't get them anymore and things like that. And like, I know that after my surgery I know that a lot of things will improve even more, that I'll feel more comfortable in my body.

[transition]

Andrew (voiceover): Unfortunately my mom still wasn't at peace with the situation.

Andrew (voiceover): March 10th, 2020. I told my psychologist recently that I no longer tell my mom about things that are important to me, because she just can't be happy for me or she doesn't give the same energy back. It's as if she doesn't care that I'm finally happy after all these years. I tried to tell her about my progress in taking care of my mental health or about my top surgery, but she always just starts crying or doesn't say anything. It's as if she can't be proud of me, like she sees me as a disappointment. I feel like she gave up on me because I don't have the life she imagined for me.

[transition]

Sebastian: When I started taking hormones, when I went in for surgery, I basically realized that my body and I are on the same team, that I need it, and that it and I need to work together. That was a big turning point for me, all of a sudden I wasn't in conflict with my body, instead it was cooperating with me, and this also helped me develop a good relationship with myself, it really helped my self esteem and such.

[transition]

Andrew (voiceover): My transition definitely helped me feel better. It's been two years since I officially finished my transition and it's also been two years since I decided to have a closer relationship with my mom again.

Mom: ...I think you can hear the hum of the laptop, but...

Andrew (voiceover): I met up with my mom recently, four years since the interview with my sister and I asked her about her feelings regarding my coming out and my transition again.

Mom: Well initially it came as a huge shock to me. When I grasped what you were trying to say, my biggest fear was that instead of a depressed daughter I'll have a depressed son.

Andrew: When I came out and we started going to the sexologist, how were you feeling, like, what expectations did you have?

Mom: Well, I was really afraid and... Basically in the beginning I felt like I was going to lose my child, that my baby would just... disappear forever. It felt like a huge loss and... It really dawned on me when I went to the registry office to return your birth certificate in order to get the birth certificate with the temporary name. I was really distressed by it. I... You know that I cried over it a lot, I remember being shaken by something the sexologist said, he asked me what I was crying for, that nothing tragic has happened, that what would have been tragic is if you had been diagnosed with a terminal illness. You're still the same person, it's just that the form is different or something like that, you're still my child and it was essential to me that I wouldn't lose you.

Andrew: Now about the time when I sort of disconnected from you guys, because I just refused to talk about it with you and couldn't communicate with you in general...

Mom: That time when you would shut yourself in your room, that was really horrible. Because you didn't communicate and didn't explain why you were doing it... that whole situation made me even more concerned, I was afraid that my depressed daughter had turned into my depressed son. That this whole thing was for nothing and it didn't have any effect. I missed you as a person, as my child.

Andrew: I also missed you guys, I just... Basically got stuck in this... shell that I couldn't come out of, only until I felt like I could come out.

[transition]

Sebastian's Mom (Šárka): For me the most important thing is that Sebi is happy, that he's healthy and that he's living a life that feels authentic to him, that he's going in the direction that is right for him. I have a healthy, handsome son, he's smart, responsible, independent and I think this has made our relationship stronger, even though I realize that I wasn't always a hundred percent there for him at the exact moment that he needed me, but otherwise I wouldn't change anything. The only thing that changes

things is time. When it comes to me, I knew that no matter how big of a problem I'd have accepting it, I would never turn my back on my child, never. No matter what.

Sebastian: For me personally it was really important to have the space to realize what I need to tell my parents and what I want to tell them. I guess the most important thing is that the child doesn't feel like their parents have completely shut them out. It's definitely not easy for the parents and I think that when we tell them we're trans, expecting them to react super positively, like them baking a cake and throwing a party for us, or expecting them to accept it immediately... Man, we also haven't accepted it right away, it also took us a while! It's a big challenge for trans people to not feel like someone's invalidating us, because it happens so much.

[transition]

Andrew (voiceover): In hindsight, I sympathize more with how my mom was feeling back then. Transitioning was really hard so I mostly focused on my own feelings and I wished that my identity wasn't so painful for my mom. Regardless of her feelings though, she never stood in my way, she would go to the doctor with me, and she used the correct pronouns. Looking back I really appreciate it because I'm not sure I would have been able to handle all the hardships without those things.

Andrew: Do you think that if we had talked about it more or just communicated more that it would have been better? Like that time would have been...

Mom: Well, communicating would have definitely helped. You know that I need to talk to the people that are closest to me, I need to share things with them and resolve the issues even when it's painful. I am thankful for every day that we can share together and for every time we can talk about any problems that arise. That we can have open communication and... I just look ahead.

Andrew: How do you see me being trans now, like, what's your view on it in the present day?

Mom: Well, I think you did the right thing, that you're much happier now. Of course it didn't solve all of your problems, but... I think that... maybe if you had stayed a girl that you wouldn't have even been here in this world by now. You know, I've already accepted it, I know it was your journey and I guess it was meant to happen. I just want you to be happy and I guess this is a part of that.

Andrew: Is there anything else you wanted to say?

Mom: That I love you...

Andrew: I love you too...

Mom: And I'm happy that you're my child.

Andrew: I'm glad that you're my mom and that you tried to understand me even though it was hard...