

Breakthrough*

My name is Rosario, and I'm trans. I am also a laboratory technician of pathological anatomy, a job that I love and I do with dedication. When I succeeded in the public competition, I was of course over the moon, and immensely proud of myself. However, it was difficult because the topics to be studied were broad, considering that my work deals with many fields; from physiology to pathology, immunology, molecular biology, genetics, pharmacology, microbiology, and so on.

Today, I am fifty years old and I have been working in the hospital for about twenty years. I remember the day I showed up at work in my new ward. It was March and I had an elegant outfit, brown leather coat with matching shoes and bag. All very masculine, I was very masculine. At that time, I was allowed to do it. Obviously, they greeted me with some intrigued faces because I was new there, and I also noticed that the average age of my new colleagues was roughly similar to mine.

Meanwhile, my private life, I would say, was going well, a woman with whom I had a seemingly perfect relationship, with a house and many happy dreams. I imposed my presumed homosexuality on others with kindness, normality, depth, without leaving the slightest doubt that I had a happy life, complete, alive. And it was real. I did not pretend, I never pretended, but I thought I was a lesbian. I liked women, I didn't think I could not make many changes to my body, if I did not dress like a man, act like a man, relate to people as a man, even though my body was clearly feminine.

Everything was fine at work, all very intense, the desire to do a good job, the investigation of each colleague's personality, in order to work well together in a job where teamwork was essential, this was combined with the wish to get things quicker, so that I was able to go home on time. It was not always easy to know each other; but there was a good vibe with two colleagues a little younger than me, so playful, with whom I struck up a friendship that for me was very important. I felt for the first time free in this unexpected relationship, with two men, who were so funny, clumsy, good, big and strong, tender and intelligent; I found out that with those two people I had a special connection, in fact, we had the same aims and way of doing things. So, one evening we went out to dinner, and even I was so scared to reveal all about me, afraid of forcing a wedge into our friendship in some way, I decided to open up and tell everything about me, I cared so much about them, that just the thought of being cast aside really scared me; but at the same time, each part of me wanted to be free.

The feeling of lightness mixed with the trembling of each part of my body, in the moment after I had talked about myself, confirmed to me that sometimes we spread fear that, like black clouds, cloud reality. But the only thing I could say was that I liked women.

In my department, you generally work in a group, in an open space, with the same schedule every day, the same people from morning to afternoon, with a lunch break in the hospital cafeteria. In my heart, I have always treasured the fact that I spent one-third of my life there, and for me, one-third of my life is very important. So, that time was not to be wasted, not only work, but done that; we should have lived our lives and build more important relationships,

* The following self-narrative account was translated into English by Chiara Mesto.

obviously with the people who really wanted it. And I have to say that over the years I haven't had many chances, except for some colleagues, who over the time became my real friends.

At that point in my life, I heard something exploding inside me in an uncontrollable way, an atomic bomb with its fire cloud, the need to adapt myself, to what I have always felt, being a man trapped in a woman's body.

In that very moment, I remember one summer afternoon, like a lightning or a vase that falls on your head, that could have killed you, a private earthquake, inside me, which involved every single cell of my body, including the desire for death. It took me a while to understand that everything I had changed throughout my life, I had put everything aside because of the misadventures of life itself, were asking me now to give them a voice. I was thirteen when it became clear to me, that I was in the wrong body, that my identity was covered by a diving suit and even then, I was struggling to get air. But it was a very different time. There were no mobile phones or Internet, nor I could talk to anyone; I was an alien, abandoned on earth by the mothership and there was nothing to do but wait, for death, for someone who would come to save me.

Meanwhile my life, externally, seemed to keep its routine, I was leaving two lives, outside and inside. On every birthday, I remember, inside, I have always celebrated twice my age.

But the misery this time was so terrifying and prevailing, that it was impossible to withstand and to shut it up.

So, I gathered all my strength, thanks to the assistance of some friends, I turned to MIT, a non-profit association, founded in 1988, who helps transsexual and transgender people.

I had found the mother ship, I had traveled for years and thanks to my resilience, I finally discovered a new life, I was able to expect the unexpected, I had wished for a miracle, that now I had to fulfill. Nothing would appear magically, but now I could collect all the pieces, try to give unique sense to my life. Thanks to the help of experts and thanks to my courage, I was little by little finishing my puzzle.

This time, however, in the applying and in the affirmation of the real me, everything in my routine had to be reworked, reinvigorated, revitalized, starting from the small things, from my world at home, in me, from relationships, in particular, from my smile, my voice, my thoughts, my music.

Everything lost its ancient color and flavor, and acquired a new color and taste, always representing something past, but at the same time new.

My discomfort, my feeling not to be well inside, no longer in peace, I could hide anymore it as I had always done; and so, it became clear that I had to analyze the surrounding reality with each person and draw up all my relationships.

One day, it was clear to me that as transgender I was forced to tell people the truth, it was not like being gay or lesbian, a very private situation, that you can keep out of your working life and circle of close acquaintances; to be trans is to begin to be myself in the fullness of what I am, without hiding it anymore, I should say it to people.

My name, what identifies me, what you perceive about me, the way you identify me, had to be changed. As a result, the simple telling you my masculine name, symbolizes a never-ending coming out, putting a blackboard in front of people, with a few sentences written on it: I am

Rosario, I am trans, I am a man in transition. When I meet someone for the first time, I put all my cards on the table yet.

So, I started from the place, where I had built my established routine, I adopted a slow, personal, new approach with each colleague. It must be said that some were also my friends, and their happy way to joke with me, helped me too. But I left nothing to chance, every relationship and every person was contacted in private, with kindness, with precision.

The first opportunities were with those people I already had a close friendship, and with lunchtime friends, I could talk, even for a short time, about something more than work; I selected the half-hour lunch break, to describe my state of mind; that I was not happy, that things were not going well and I wanted to find myself. These few words reassured me, that a small group of people, not only for curiosity, but mainly for our friendship, and because I looked them in the eye, began to speak kindlier with me, only me.

Perhaps still insecure and trembling, I began to ask people to be called with a diminutive, a nickname that suggested a small change. So, I asked everyone not to call me Rosaria but Ross, that something was happening to me and I would have liked if they have helped me in this progression.

Every lunch, every instant, coffee break, every place, had become my place, my space, situations where I imposed my life, not only to affirm myself, which was now a requirement of my whole being, but almost to raise the bar of each relationship to a higher level. And this not only because I believed it was important for me, instead of affirming me, I opened up glimpses of my soul and something more. The topics were the most varied, even comments on simple news stories, violence against minorities, ideas thanks to gender identity, were my main goal. To my surprise, opening myself up completely to the opinion of others, let me notice that, timidly, questions and opinions were rising in others.

Those people I had known for years but who hardly spoke of themselves and their past, began to open up, they described, in particular, the dreams of their future, that went back their childhood, family relationships, destroyed by misunderstandings, betrayals suffered, fears for their children, and anxieties; they seemed to be almost eagerly waiting to talk, to discuss, to open glimpses of their experience. So, for that small group of people, the times wasn't enough during the lunches at the table, the time made our conversations short.

Sometimes I had so many things to say, but I felt I was putting myself aside, I had thrown my heart open, and I had spoken of me, with the risk of losing friendships. But I could not stop myself, in affirming me and how much proud I was, staring into the eyes of my next interlocutor. All this grew in me and strengthened me at the same time so much, that I felt my puzzle was breaking itself unified, to form the truth.

I was not exempt from critics but, in hindsight, it was very edifying for me. One day, when I returned from the mess hall, in my group, a friend looked at me, with any kind of kindness, he described me all the embarrassing situations and the loneliness, that I would have experienced, if I had decided to continue to behave like that: I was already old, according to him, I should have stopped, so as not to become ridiculous with a few hairs on my face and a body with an unknown destiny. Taking hormones would have caused unidentified problems to my health, and considering that now everyone obviously already knew me, I would have to stop. He expressed all my fears, I wanted to cry and I could not reply in the same tone. So, I listened to him, and in the end, I tried to put him put him in my shoes, if he were a father, to

imagine how he would react with his son or his nephew. I wanted to go heavy, almost to silence the fears that I had. So, I told him: "Think- and God forbid- about if your child gives birth to a child, your nephew, who suffers from Down syndrome, you will love him and you will all be happy the same, God forgive me if I blaspheme. But, you, grandfather, you man, you discover that in a faraway isle of Wherever, there is a doctor, who has found a cure, expensive, perhaps painful, but safe. What do you do? You will slowly and unceasingly think and think and think about it, until "I'll take my grandson there". That's how I feel, I can do something for my life and I need it, if I do nothing, it is the same as dying inside day after day.

After a while, even if every day was new, I was calmer, people felt comfortable with this new colleague, who was a bit strange, with so many new characteristics; some people slowly, others less, some with more practice, all they gradually considered me a man, using masculine form. But I didn't want let my guard down, what I had been able to do, talking about myself, talking about transsexuality, it was too important not only for me, but for every trans person, for that movement in the air that felt like a claim of rights. I had to invent something new. I thought about doing interviews, justifying it as a study I was carrying out. The questions that I invented were: "Do you know transgender people in your circle of friends or acquaintances?" The second one: "What did you think of transsexuality and transgender people until recently?" And the third: "How did the fact that you know me now as a trans person change your idea about me?".

The answers were not all the same and not everyone was ready to talk about it. But I could say that all had the thirst to know more, the empathy towards a new world, the awareness of widespread stereotypes, the importance of every human being, who was searching happiness and self-assertion.

Today I'm satisfied, but not really happy. As a pre-t, my appearance still does not reflect what I feel, I am, when people tell me "good evening madam", it is still a knife to my heart, my breasts cause me anger and pain; but thanks to life, thanks to MIT, thanks to me, I am always myself.