

OHS student prepares for gender transition, life in Mississippi

Author's note: *The Charger recently interviewed an Oxford High School student who is transitioning. Born as a male, the student identifies as a female and has made the decision to begin the process to take on the physical characteristics of a female. To protect her identity in the article, the student will be referred to as Mai Day.*

By Emma Scott
news editor

Finding one's true self while growing up poses challenges for us all, but the maturation process can be particularly confusing when your true gender isn't what it seems to be on the surface.

"You know earlier than you're conscious of knowing," explained Mai Day, a transgender Oxford High School senior.

The person Day's family and friends saw when they looked at her — and what Day herself observed in the mirror — was male. Day struggled inwardly with her outward appearance during her adolescent age.

"I felt out of place when I was like 10," she said. "I felt like I fit in better with girls, and I never really thought about it much until I started hearing about trans people."

Day researched the subject of gender identity by reading interviews of trans individuals and by exploring the topic in works of fiction. She realized who she really was and came out as transgender to a friend when she was 15.

About a year later, she

confided in her mother.

"I think I came out to my mom maybe two years ago," Day said. "She took it surprisingly well. She was just more concerned about outside forces and concerned that I wasn't sure. My dad, we never talk about it. He knows, but we never talk about it."

It may not be much longer before everyone will see Day for the gender she truly identifies as, because she plans to begin the hormone replacement therapy that will allow her to transition physically.

"I have an appointment with an endocrinologist soon," Day said. "I'm going in early April to drive up to Memphis and see what happens."

Though Day enjoys living in Mississippi and plans to stay in the region, she knows it will have its difficult days.

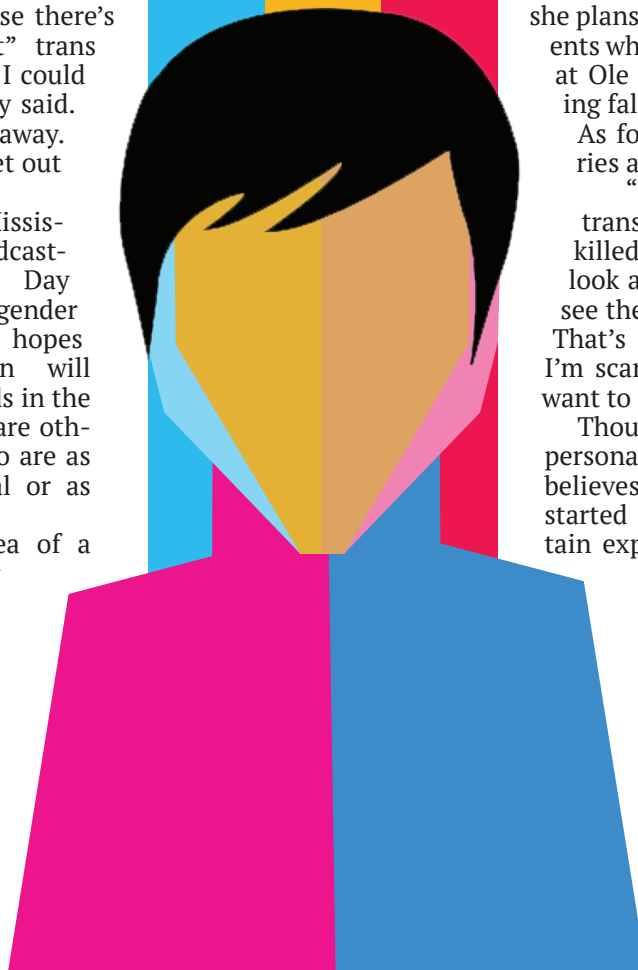
"Being trans in Mississippi is hard because there's not a lot of 'out' trans people nearby that I could go and talk to," Day said. "Everyone moves away. Everyone tries to get out of the South."

Recently, Mississippi Public Broadcasting interviewed Day about being transgender in Mississippi. She hopes her representation will help other trans kids in the state realize there are other trans people who are as "completely normal or as weird as you are."

"I like the idea of a young person, my age when I figured it out, going to school with their parents listening to that and being like, 'Oh, there's other people,'" Day said. "I went a long time without knowing any trans people. It's a low per-

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centage of people, but trans kids need to be shown there are other trans people."

Day said the three biggest worries for trans people are "jobs, housing, and life in general."

In terms of jobs, Day fears that when she does begin transitioning, she might get fired due to either an employer or a customer's intolerance for trans people.

However, Mykki Newton, a local transgender woman and videographer at the University of Mississippi, has her own advice for this concern.

"Get the job first, then start transitioning," Newton said. "A lot of places these days have policies or guidelines in place if an employee starts to transition."

For housing, Day worries a landlord will be uncomfortable or she will not be able to find roommates.

That's one reason why she plans to live with her parents when she starts college at Ole Miss in the upcoming fall semester.

As for life, Day just worries about staying alive.

"There are a lot of trans people who get killed," Day said. "You look at the news, and you see they're not covering it. That's one of the reasons I'm scared, because I don't want to die."

Though Day has never personally felt fearful, she believes if she had already started her transition, certain experiences would not have felt as safe.

"I have felt situations that if I was out, if I dressed more femininely, if I had started hormones and people could recognize I was trans, I would be terrified," Day said. "I worry I won't have as

much fun when I start transitioning and I won't want to go out as much."

For students with these fears, Newton suggests they find groups to hang out with and document any dangerous or offensive event.

"Get with the GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance). They are going to be a tremendous amount of help," Newton said. "If there are any incidents that happen, make sure they are reported."

Day expects criticism and skepticism from people who may not support her transition, or even believe her, but she has a message for them.

"My life has nothing to do with yours," Day said. "Me being trans and transitioning has nothing to do with you. Realize how much time I have gone through with this. I'm about to start a chemical that will change my body forever. That's how serious I am."

Day suggests that allies of trans people can listen to trans musicians or buy books by trans authors, but mostly she asks for allies for their support.

"You're not going to get everything right on the first try," Day said. "You're going to mess up on names and pronouns, but as long as you're honest about messing up and don't speak down to people, most people won't get upset with you."

As for transgender students, Newton knows that life won't always be easy, but with allies and her idea of the true meaning of courage, the hard times will be a little more bearable.

"It's always going to be a battle," Newton said. "There will be people who will be against you, but there will also be people standing by your side. Never forget that. It's hard not to be afraid. Courage is not the lack of fear. Courage is going ahead with something despite tremendous fear."