

Chapter 1

When I Happened on the Way to Being Me

In 2018, I happened on the way to being me.

I didn't merely come out MtF transgender; I discovered I was trans in the first place—as much news to me as it became to the world.

One could hope that every nanosecond anniversary we become more ourselves, but that road trip isn't an expressway progression. Some years are better than others. On December 31, 2017, to quote the movie, *Hot Fuzz*, I had “a great big bushy beard.” A year later, I had breasts! Yes, *real breasts*, as I hit my true puberty.

Some years are worse than others. Those years when my body writhed in its male-assigned puberty, were the most horrific of my existence. I'd no idea what was happening. For the next 40 orbits of the sun, I lost me—the real me, disappearing in my rearview mirror. Hitching a ride in place of absent me came anxiety, depression, and OCD that, teamed with my smarts, gave me the roadmap to plot out that I was miserable but also to frustrate every effort for the next 40 years to grasp why.

In what I thought at the time was a valiant effort to keep the tires between the lines, I sped through ideologies and tribes, one after another, to find a home, or at least a way-place where I could drop the rusting, screeching, tail-lights-out trailer that was life, if only for a few seconds. Every rest stop was as unfulfilling as a kid dreaming of Disney World, only to see that Exit 123 is another Shoney's.

I swore off rest stops and found that the car breaks down if

you don't gas it, change the oil, and fill the tires. So, about 15 years ago, I took antidepressants and therapy like a performance vehicle takes synthetic oil, to delay the inevitable breakdowns.

The thing is, I didn't know *why* my life was this goddamned Interstate trip. I kept running on empty, a la Jackson Browne and *Forrest Gump*. "Run, Babsie, Run!!" Except I wasn't Babsie. I wasn't even me. I'd no idea that life didn't have to be pounding asphalt, glaring headlights, and XXX stores at the seedy exits.

Then I met Bethany (aka Babsie). It was like falling in love for the first time—which I was (and still am) with myself, my *real self*. In *Little Gidding*, T.S. Eliot describes arriving "at where we started [to] know the place for the first time." I've been up and down this Interstate on countless trips, but, damn! I'm seeing Bethany billboards of me for the first time and finding I *like* Shoney's.

I enjoy coffee with Babsie. She's fun. She doesn't blow up at inconsequential shit, like the cruise control not working. Babs and I most often get the French Toast, with the fake maple syrup. We appreciate the wait staff, especially Cora, who nests a gross of pens in her bouffant but keeps smiling—not in spite of working at Shoney's but *because* she works at Shoney's.

Bethany went through my male puberty, locked in the trunk. I didn't hear her banging the hatch with the tire iron till I'd run out of gas and settled on walking the interstate, noting roadkill. Bethany didn't yell at me when I let her out of the trunk. She didn't yank out my beard or tear at my nipples demanding they become lady boobies. She hugged me. And she hasn't let go since.

It was then that I noticed I'm not on the road. I'm at home. With me.