Sons and Daughters

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

I have heard it said, and I have found out for myself, that the best friends you make later in life are the parents of your children’s best friend. If your children are important to you then you care for the people they care about, and the important people in their lives. If your kids spend time together when they are small, you meet the parents and bond with them over you common enthusiasm for whatever they are doing. You not only stand on the side-lines of the sports field, but you host together, the fund-raising barbeques as well.

It certainly helped that Patrick’s parents seemed to be similar to us, not least because Patrick was so close to our son Drake. Patrick had an older sister about the same age as our oldest son, and while they were never as close as their younger siblings, they got on well when our families shared holiday time together. It sometimes included Thanksgiving or Christmas, or at least part of it. We were that close.

Any parent will tell you that some of the best memories of your children is to see them having fun – just laughing out loud at the sheer joy of being alive in such a fascinating world, that may have become dull and tired for us. It seemed like Drake and Patrick shared many such moments. I remember hugging Patrick more than once. He seemed like a member of our family.

I suppose that we came to see him as different only around middle school. They had both seemed so similar but then it appeared that Drake seemed to take the lead and Patrick seemed to follow. Drake seemed to become even more boisterous, and while Patrick was never quiet, he seemed more interested in activities at home.

It was even later that I realized that Patrick was pretty. It was well before puberty marched in, but it was clear to see that Patrick was soft whereas Drake was rough. That did not mean that Patrick was not up for anything that Drake would have them involved in, just that he was a little cautious and had an understanding that he was not as strong as his pal.

Drake never commented on it, and why should he? He accepted Patrick for who he was. I did not learn Patricks secret from him but from Patrick’s mother, Joanne, who might well have been my best friend at that time.

“Patrick is transgender,” she said, just as plainly as that. “He is terrified of puberty and pleading for us to allow blockers to stop the effects of the male hormones. I probably should say “she” but it still seems so early. You are the first person I have told outside our family. I feel I can talk to you about anything.”

“You can – of course, you can,” I said. I gave her a hug. I felt nothing but sympathy. What a dilemma it must have presented. The poor child burdened with such an affliction, and Joanne and her husband – all of their hopes and dreams for their son dashed. What kind of future would the poor child have? And there other child was a daughter – they would lose their son, and we had two.

I decided that I needed to talk to Drake about it, so that night I sat him down before he went to bed.

“I know all about it, Mom,” he said. “Pat is a girl inside. He says that he can take drugs that will stop him turning into a man, and he can go on being like a big kid for a while, but what he really wants is to turn into a girl with long hair and dresses and stuff. But we will still best pals.”

I cannot tell you how proud I was of my son. Here was a child who must have been shocked by the news, whenever he might have received it. But he was loyal to his friend, and he would stick by him through whatever was to happen next. I could only guess how hard it would be for “Pat” but knowing that you have a friend like Drake must have been a huge reassurance. People can only wish for friends like that.

Pat was able to put things off until before he started high school. All the kids except Pat seemed to have gone through changes, except him. He was still a he on the surface although he was growing his hair and growing some other things too, but concealed. Joanne had enrolled Pat in high school as Patricia, and from then on, she would be her.

Drake said that the facts were widely known around middle school, especially among the girls. People were supportive in general, but some of the boys were known to whisper “Tranny” as Pat walked past. Drake got into a couple of scrapes standing up for his friend, and on one occasion I was called in to see the principal, but the message was that Drake was widely admired by the teaching staff, and his just needed to show restraint. Again I was proud of my boy, and I told him so.

It was Drake’s idea to hold a “Re-birthday Party” for the new Patricia in advance of their both starting at high school. I baked a cake and helped with a banner. Pat’s family came just like they would on other occasions, and a select few kids from school were also invited. The only difference was that Pat would be attending the party in a dress.

It seemed to me that I had seen the slow process of Patrick becoming Patricia so seeing her at the party in her honor would come as no surprise, but I was wrong. Maybe I thought that she would turn up looking like a boy in a princess outfit, or something that screamed - “Look at me, I’m a girl!” I was totally unprepared for the first time that I met Patricia. She was wearing a simple dress, and her hair that was still quite short was in bouncy curls, and her face was about as pretty as any girl I had ever met, even with very subtle makeup.

“Oh my God, Patricia!” I said. “You must have come straight from the salon?”

“I did my own hair and makeup,” she said, in a lovely feminine voice. “I have been practising for quite a long time.” It was clear that was very true.

Drake was grinning in the background. The look on his face was one of satisfaction – his friend Pat had done well. They always shared pride in each other’s accomplishments, and that was not going to change even though the change in Pat was so dramatic it had stunned me.

We cut the cake and Pat stepped up to say thank you and to talk a little about the challenges ahead and the need for a strong circle of friends to help her through it. I remember thinking how well she spoke and the sense of quiet determination that she displayed. I looked across at Joanne who was clapping furiously. How proud she was of her child. She even shed a tear or two. I was almost envious. She was losing a son and would have two daughters. I had none.

There were challenges and rough waters at high school, but Pat sailed through them. She had three great strengths – her character, determined and good humored, her support from her parents, and from Drake and in a few others, and her beauty. As I had guessed on her first day there, she was as pretty as any girl at the school, but her strength shone through and added another element.

She and Drake still hung around together. It seemed like their friendship was unshakable.

It was when they were well into high school that my older son broke up with his long-term girlfriend. Although it had been extremely serious, their relationship could not last while he was away at college. I suppose that I assumed that they would get married at start a family, which is what I wanted for both of my boys. It got me talking to Drake about his status, and whether he was dating girls.

“Sorry, Mom, I thought you must have realized – Tish and I are together.” It hit me like a bullet.

“But Honey, Pat, Tish, she is your friend, surely not your girlfriend? She is not even a real woman.” I realized immediately what I had said, and maybe I might have gasped a little at the sheer brutality of the words, but I was a mother, and sometimes we can be aggressive in protecting our young, and wanting the best future for them. Still, I felt I had to correct myself. “I mean by that, you have known Patrick all your life, and he is still there, somewhere inside the woman he has become.”

“You really don’t understand, do you, Mom?” He looked at me with sad exasperation. “There was no man in Patrick, not ever. She was a child and then she was a woman. I knew the child and we were close, but I love the woman. She is my girlfriend, and I hope that she will be more than that, in time.

“But she can’t be a mother. You know that don’t you?” I was getting into more trouble, but I could not help but believe that there would come a time in Drake’s life when he would ask himself why he chose somebody who could never allow him to be a father. For me and my husband our children meant so much that surely I can be forgiven for these thoughts?

“There are options for parenthood Mom, but first what we want is to have sex as man and woman, and that means surgery. We are saving up, but when we graduate we will both need to get work to earn the money for her operation.”

“But what about college? You need a college degree to get ahead these days. You are smarter than your older brother. We have high hopes for you, Drake. Sex can wait.”

“It is not about sex, Mom. She needs to be rid of what does not belong on her otherwise perfect body,” said Drake. He was getting progressively angrier with me, and I could see it. It was just that it seemed to me that he was throwing his future away in pursuit of a fantasy, believing that Pat or Tish, could be a proper wife to him.

As I have tried to explain – I am a mother. I only want the best for my boy.

As for Pat, she is a beautiful girl, I can’t deny it. She might be every boy’s fantasy. She can have any boy she likes, would be my guess. Just not my Drake. You can understand, can’t you?

The End

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