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Girl in a Boy Body: The Complexity of Being Oneself

Nicole Maines of *Becoming Nicole* is like any other girl her age; she likes dresses, makeup, gossip, and boys. The only difference? She was born male. Growing up, Nicole was always expressing how she was a “girl in a boy body.” For her, the choice to begin transitioning was easy. However, the transition from birth gender to the identity held inside is far more than physical. For Nicole, this meant that though she was confident in herself dressing as a female, she had to overcome the demons of gender dysphoria mentally and the ignorance of the public around her. Slowly, being transgender is becoming less taboo due to an increase in publications and news stories about transgender individuals as well as popular T.V. shows, such as *I Am Jazz*, which profiles the everyday life of a transgender teen. However, stigmas are still present and these individuals are subject to scrutiny and harassment every day. With the support of her loving family, therapists, and lawmakers, Nicole was able to transform into the strong, beautiful woman and activist that she is today, mentally at peace with her mind and body united as one.

In addition to Nicole’s transition, her entire family experienced less visible but equally important changes. Most notably, her father Wayne’s journey of coming to terms that Nicole wasn’t going through a “transgender phase.” He stuck by her side as she waded through adolescence, but complete acceptance of the situation took longer for him than for his wife and kids. His son was transforming into his daughter so quickly that he saw it as loss and went through the stages of grief. He experienced anger, depression, and denial, among other things, before reaching acceptance. As their story unfolded, Wayne’s fears melted away, and he launched a public speaking career, advocating for transgender rights. Arguably a less dramatic change, Nicole’s mom, Kelly, was determined to provide her child with everything needed to

start the self-exploration journey and became an ally by researching gender identity disorder. Finally, similarly to Nicole, Jonas was struggling to find his own individuality and how to express it. Growing up, he saw himself as “someone else’s brother” which plunged him into a depression that he had to overcome. Nicole credited him as her biggest supporter, and though his view of her never changed, his transformation came in the separation of being a member of the “transgender family” to being his own person with his own accolades.

Aside from individual development, it’s also important to analyze how the family as a whole transformed in response to Nicole being transgender. The acceptance required was more than just saying, “Okay, this is how it’s going to be from now on.” It was a whole lifestyle change. They went from being no-name white collar workers from a small town in Maine to being thrust into the spotlight after having to leave their hometown due to inadequate protective measures taken by the twins’ school. The Maineses handled this probing of their private lives remarkably well. Though Kelly was often left to manage the kids and their emotions on her own most of the time, the discussion of separation from Wayne never came up. With divorce rates at an all time high, it’s not uncommon for extreme stressors such as having a transgender child to tear families apart. Instead, the Maineses took every obstacle as a chance to advocate for their daughter. This brought them even closer during their darkest days and contributed to the “success” of Nicole’s transition to becoming her true self.

If there was ever a guideline for the “typical American family” the Maineses certainly wouldn’t fit the criteria. Lucky for them, society has grown, changed, and expanded so much that no one classification could describe an average family. Families now are so much different now than they were in the past. Couples are having fewer children, most women have entered the workplace, and there is increased emphasis on individuality and creativity. Families are more

ethnically, racially, financially, and religiously diverse than ever, and these differences are helping to pull the country in a new direction. There is a liberal surge enveloping our nation, and it seems that new human rights disparities are being brought to light each day. *Becoming Nicole* did an excellent job at highlighting this by showing the real-life challenges that these families face and how they can be overcome.

In essence, Nicole's story was one of relentlessly searching for who you are and finding that it's who you've always been. At the end of the day, the whirlwind of pride, emotions, and insecurities all blended together into a lifetime that no one could have predicted and that the Maineses would never take back.