Take your Daughter to Work

In Response to a Challenge

By Maryanne Peters

Dad told me about the ‘Take your daughter to work’ day, and I wanted to go. My Dad works in TV, and I have always wanted to visit the studio. Dad really loves the work there, and always makes it sound really cool, but the studio was strictly off limits to everybody except staff signed up to confidentiality agreements. The general policy was that no other people were allowed in the complex. The exception was to be the ‘Take your daughter to work’ day, which was to be the day after Mothers’ Day and supposed to recognize the studio’s support for working mothers. Dad said that it was a special exception and a one off, and my chance to visit the studio.

I really wanted to go. The only catch was that I was not a daughter – I was a son.

But then again, you might ask how could Dad qualify as a mother? Well, the fact is that he did, because my father – my Dad – is now a woman. She transitioned shortly after my mother died of cancer. I remember the very moment Dad told me her secret.

“I loved your mother, but she loved the man I pretended to be,” she said. “I lived that lie for her, but for you I think you need a mother more than a father.” Sh had been transgender all along, and now she was ready to change because she thought it would be good for both of us.

The truth is that before Mom got sick Dad worked all hours so I never got to see him, but he quit to care for her and we got closer. After that she made drastic changes in the course of transitioning from male to female, assisted by the death insurance payout. When he was ready to go back to work, she took a job at the studio as Maggie, a solo mother working hours that ensured I was never a latchkey kid.

I had to change school to be closer to Dad’s new job, and there everybody just accepted that I had a mother not a father. I never called her “Dad” – I felt that I could never call her “Mom” but I often just called her “Maggie” in front of others. I don’t think that she ever told the studio about her past. She was Maggie to everybody.

I have learnt a lot more about transgender issues since and how hard it is for men to pass as women, but somehow that never seemed to apply to Maggie. She always said it was because she had always been a woman inside, but I guess it helped that she was attractive in a natural way, and she had the female voice just right.

The studio accepted that she was a mother, so it seemed that she was just the kind of person this day was all about. But what about me? I was not a daughter. It seemed wrong on so many levels

“I am sorry, Honey,” Maggie said. “It is a female only thing. Daughters only. So, if you want to follow your Dad to work, you will have to follow your Dad into womanhood – just for a day, of course.”

I think that she was only joking. But like I said, I really did want to go. I suppose I figured – how hard can it be? My dad was able to do it, so I can do it too.

“No, I am joking,” she said. “This is not so easy. I like to think that it is because I was always a woman, it was like pretending when I lived as a man. But for you, it would be trying to be something you’re not. But, I have to say, it would be great to have you try, just to get a feel for living as a girl, if only for a day … and only if you want to.”

I have to say that I was curious about it. For me the primary objective had been to have a look inside the studio, but the whole question of gender was something that I had tried to understand. I guess people don’t think about it unto the life of somebody close to them brings it into focus. What was it that drove my father to have his body surgically altered? It seems like insanity when Dad first told me about it. Why would somebody go through all of that? Surely there had to be an easier way? Couldn’t Dad be counselled on a way to cope with it short of amputation?

But when you understand that it is that serious that there is no other way, you nod your head that you understand, but really you don’t. How could you?

“I would want to try to be like you, Maggie, a complete woman,” I said. “But I figure that if I have to disclose that I am a transgirl, who would deny me being a daughter for a day – right?”

I was aware that Dad could do the same, but he never did. For him being accepted as a woman was important. Being a transwoman was what he was, but not what he wanted.

We looked at one another and I think we knew that we were going to do this. It was like me reaching out for a better understanding.

But it would take some preparations and time was limited given that I would be going with her to work only a few days later, but the fact is that I had the best coach in the world – somebody who had been through it all.

She knew all the tricks too, did my Dad Maggie. She still had the foundation garments that she used through her transition, and she knew how to prepare her skin and apply makeup that would be understated but effective in producing a feminine face. But what about my hair.

“A girl of your age would never been seen in a wig, but we could get your extensions,” she said. “It seems extravagant for just one day, but I am not about to have you go through the trauma of being outed on your day at my workplace. The ladies at my salon will be able to help. The owner is a transwoman herself. Lets try to get an appointment the night before.”

She made the call and it was arranged, but until then I had to work on my presentation. It was largely a case of “do as I do”, and following the example of a successful transwoman. Dad was encouraging and understanding and I was keen to please her. It was a winning comination.

I came home from school that Thursday and I was rushed to the salon to get my hair extensions put in. It did seem crazy going to all that effort, but when I looked at myself in the mirror after they were done, I understood what it was all about. The extensions were in my color near the roots but more blonde as they reached my shoulders. I was able to flick the hair over my shoulder in a way that felt feminine, and also to brush my hair just as a woman might. It felt like my hair. It felt like a woman’s hair. It made me feel like a woman in a way that a wig never could, I suppose. I could not take it off and leave it on the dressing table stand like a wig. This was me.

“”Let’s put in in a loose braid tonight and get you into a nightie,” said Dad. “I think your girl day should start tonight.”

I spent quite awhile just looking at myself in the mirror, dressed in that nightie and with my braid dangling down. I know that men dress up as women and get off on it, but this was nothing like that. I found myself thinking about how I looked so different even though the changes were not major given that I was not wearing makeup. But it was as if my face was different somehow – calm and gentle – womanly I suppose. It did not make any sense.

I slept well, and in the morning I woke up determined not to let Dad down. I was going to try to be as much of a woman as she was.

“A little make is called for but it must be understated,” she said. And after that she took my hair out of the braid and it fell around my shoulder with a slight wave in it. I looked great, and I knew it.

We drove to the studio and past the security.

“It’s ‘Take your daughter to work’ day,” she explained. “This is my daughter Amanda.” It was a name that she chose and I did not argue. You carry the name you are give, I guess, but I quite like it. Dad said it means “beloved”. I like that too.

She introduced me to some of her coworkers, and to her boss Karl Pilzer. I asked him whether I could use my phone to keep a video record of the day.

“Just stay away from filming us filming,” he said with a smile. But why don’t you go onto Sound Stage 4 where a teen drama is being shot. Just keep your phone away. It is in development and strictly under wraps.

“This is a good idea,” Maggie said. “It is still a work day for me, so I can leave you with Tasco who is the producer while I catch up on a few things. It will be great for you to see how shows are made and we can meet for lunch and spend the afternoon together.”

They were filming a classroom scene on the sound stage. Most of the school scenes were fimed in an actual school outside school hours, but for this scene they had a set. There were lots of cast members standing ready to be positioned, most of them my age, or they looked it. Tasco had a seat to watch things and a spare seat for me.

“We have an empty desk here!” The guy who I was told was the director called out the words as if it was a crisis. “We need a body!” Whatever that meant. “Hey, Tazz, can we borrow your friend?”

“Well?” Tasco elbowed me. The director was talking about me! I had no clue about acting, but my first lesson was about who was an actor and who was “a background actor” otherwise known as an extra.

“The costume is fine. The hair is good. Get makeup over here!” The director had seated everybody who needed to be, and I was standing with a woman adding color to my face.

“Over here,” the director called. “Maybe sit here and look out the window playing with that hair”

The gut sitting next to me introduced himself while the cameras took position. “Hi, you can call me Kit – you know like Kit Carson.” I had no idea what he was talking about but he seemed nice.

“Quiet in the back! Action!”

I just did what I was told. There were real actors in the front, and they were saying their lines while I looked out a fake window. But it was exciting even to be there.

“Hey, we need a worshipper over here. Someone to look at the lead with worship. Hey you! The pretty girl by the window!”

It sounds cliché, but I actually looked both ways to see the pretty girl before it dawned on me he was talking to me.

“Yeah you. Change seats with this girl here. I want you to look at this guy like he is a Greek god. Can you do that. Just stare at him like he is an ice cream on a hot afternoon”.

It seemed like I was going to be on screen. I did not need prompting. He was a good looking guy. I did not need to imagine that he was an ice cream. The look on my face must have been good. The director seemed pleased.

“Make a note of her name. Put her down as ‘Adoring girl’. We will need her for Scene 63 and maybe some others.”

“It looks like you’re in the cast,” said Kit, as we took a short break.

“Really?” I said. “Wow.” But I suddenly realized what that meant. “Just a minute, I can’t…”.

“Make this the break for lunch,” somebody called out I needed to catch up with Maggie.

“I didn’t get your name,” said Kit. He was looking at me strangely, or at least it seemed that way. I suddenly realized that he was a good-looking guy too. Not like the male lead, but a regular sort of attractive young man – somebody whose arm you would be proud to cling to. Something had changed and I was not sure quite when it had happened.

“I’m Amanda,” I said, and it felt entirely natural, as if I had been her my whole life.

He asked for my phone and put in his number. He said – “Just in case you might want to get in touch. I guess we are both just starting out, and sometimes it helps to have a friend.”

Just starting out in what? I guess he meant television, but that was not what I was starting out in. I was starting out as a girl, and I already had a boy.

I met Dad at the commissary, as they call the cafeteria at the studio. I was confused, and I just blurted out the whole thing.

“How do you feel about all of this?” she said.

“Thanks to you, Maggie, I thought I knew all about what being transgender is, but now I am not so sure. Can it be inherited? Can you not know that you are transgender until one day you discover that you feel more comfortable being a girl? Can you suddenly become attracted to boys when you never thought that you were before?”

“It looks like this ‘Take your daughter to work’ day is likely to be one of many”, she said. How true that has turned out to be



The End

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