

# TELL ME your story

Students share stories central to being them

## BE TRUE TO YOURSELF

By Etana Parks, sophomore

**Princess dresses and imagination** can only distract you for so long. Despite what your mind is telling you, you still have that buzz cut and a masculine name that doesn't even register in your mind. Once you take that tiara off, you have to deal with reality. My reality was that I wasn't a girl.

Everyday of my life, from 3 years old to 15 years old, I spent time in my imagination. Reality always was my enemy. I was assigned male at birth, despite my imagination casting me away to a faraway plain where I wasn't known as Ethan, but Artemis. Or, Hazel. Or, Iris. Or, Aurora. Or, any of those number of identities I've had in these past 12 years.

Imagination was a powerful thing that allowed me to be myself for short stints. But reality always came to drag me back where I had to deal with Ethan and my outward appearance, where I was defined as male. That was something I couldn't escape, no matter how many times I ran away into my imagination.

I didn't know I was trans. I just thought I was stuck this way, with no escape. That didn't stop me from praying to God that he'd grant my wish and magically transform me into a woman. I promised I would worship him everyday. Yet, when I woke up, I was still the same. It hurt, but somehow I knew nothing would change.

There was a point where I thought I had to settle for the fact that I was gay. An effeminate, homosexual man. Less than two weeks later, Caitlyn Jenner publicly came out as trans. Of course, I'd heard about trans people, but most of it was in a negative light. Like, on the Jerry Springer show. A "T" slur usually accompanied the name, so my view of trans people was less than favorable.

But, Caitlyn did something for me. As problematic as she was, she gave me hope to be myself. October 2015, I was thinking to myself in the shower. What was I? I was doing massive research on the LGBT community,

and I needed to discover my identity.

It suddenly hit me. Maybe it was all the steam getting to my head, but I figured it out. I was trans. Without a moment's hesitation, I leaped out of the shower, racing to my phone, immediately messaging my best friend at the time about it.

Immediate acceptance. A few moments later, I told my mother. Then, the leader of what was then called GSA. That's all I did, besides loads of research. I didn't actively pursue my transition, due to my own fears.

Until December 2015. On Dec. 4, I was prescribed hormones. I took them, but still didn't socially transition. Time went on. The summer arrived, and I realized it was time.

I changed my name to Etana on Facebook, officially started going by that name and dressed differently. I went out for the first time like this.

The first reaction I got was a little girl saying, "Mommy, is that a boy?" I tried to push through the initial pain, a pain that I thought I'd prepared myself for. "No sweetie, that's a girl," the mother would say to her daughter, a smile on her face. She was the first to inspire the idea that maybe I would be all right in this new world.

Since then, I've continued to grow in myself. I've been on the end of verbal transphobic attacks, but I've received support tenfold. Now, when I look in the mirror, I don't see that old person I used to. I see Etana for the first time in my life.

I know I'm not done. Not anywhere close to being done. But, I feel confident that it's truly the journey to get there that's better than the arrival. If there was anything I'd want people to take from my journey, it's that you should always strive to be the best version of yourself. Don't hide behind tired stereotypes. Break through these boundaries and fight for yourself. Make yourself happy before you listen to anyone else.

Most of all, I want you to be proud of who you are. Be courageous and fight to break the mold.

Photo by Ian Jones

