



**My Daughter, Tyler**

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Hi, my name is Marie. I'm a happily single mother of two, born and raised in Brownsville, Brooklyn. My mother was from South Carolina and my father's parents were from St. Kitts. Now I live in Williamsburg with one of my children, Tyler. I've always been into helping people and work at a homeless shelter.

My life seemed pretty simple until the day my 14-year-old son's teacher called me into school. I arrived to find Tyler wearing a wig and makeup. I stood there in shock, looking for an explanation. When we got home I asked Tyler, "Why you dressing like a girl? You're a boy!" At that time, Tyler said, "I don't know." Now I grew up with gay friends and knew about people attracted to the same sex, but I had never heard about someone wanting to be a different gender. This scared me. I didn't want Tyler to get hurt. So for the next year, I told him he couldn't dress that way. He began to skip school and our relationship suffered.

On weekends, I would let Tyler stay at a friend's place in the projects. One night I got a call from the police informing me that Tyler was shot in the arm. On the way to the hospital, the policeman

said, "You know, your child is dressed like a girl." Tyler had been messing with some guy — when his boys saw them together, they said, "That's a dude." To save face, he chased and shot Tyler.

That's when everything changed. I was so grateful Tyler was alive. I realized I had to figure out what this is about, or I could lose my child forever. I read resources online and called different support agencies to educate myself. I learned that for transgender people it's more than wearing the clothes of the opposite sex, like when someone is a cross dresser. They feel deep down that their gender identity is different from their biological sex at birth. I went to Tyler and said, "Tell me. Is this how you feel?" She said, "Yes, Mommy, I've always known." I had to look into myself. Tyler was not going to change. Instead, I was going to have to learn to accept her.

Trust me, it has not been easy. She's been discriminated against at school and on the streets. Sometimes I still have to remind myself that this is who she is. But we talk openly now. She knows she will always be my child and that I love and support her.

Visit [Project Accept LGBTQ Youth](https://ProjectAccept.org) at [CAMBA.org/ProjectALY](https://CAMBA.org/ProjectALY) and [Project ALY/CAMBA](https://ProjectALY/CAMBA).

NOV2018

This project was supported by grant number 13-STC-655 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, through the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to Public Health Solutions. Its contents are solely the responsibility of CAMBA, Inc. and do not necessarily represent the official views of the funders.

  
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