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.