



by MARY JACKSON

photos by Chris Landsberger/Genesis

LAURA TO JAKE AND BACK AGAIN

AFTER TRYING TO LIVE AS A MAN FOR YEARS,
LAURA PERRY FINDS CHRIST'S LOVE IN THE
PROCESS OF DETRANSITIONING

*This story mentions sexual abuse
and transgender procedures*

Nearly nine months had passed since Laura Perry last saw her parents. On a Saturday night, July 19, 2007, Paul and Francine Perry's 40th wedding anniversary, Laura joined their table at a Luby's Cafeteria in Tulsa, Okla., sporting a newly buzzed haircut and a sprouting beard.

Underneath men's clothing, she wore a chest binder and a male genital prosthesis. After minutes of awkward small talk—Laura spoke with a deepened voice—Paul excused himself to the restroom. Francine leaned in: “Laura, are you trying to look like a man?”

To her own surprise, Laura burst into tears. To everyone else in her life, she was now Jake. That night, she pushed back the unwanted tears and her parent's concerns. She convinced herself she was born in the wrong body.

For months, Laura had been injecting testosterone into her thigh muscle every two weeks. Her goal was to erase Laura: the gender dysphoria, rejection, self-loathing, and sexual brokenness. She legally changed her name to Jake, a character she came up with in fantasy stories she wrote as a child. She chose the middle name Nathan, after a brother she never met (Francine miscarried two sons in the two years leading up to Laura's birth).

When Laura announced she was Jake, a local LGBT support group in Tulsa “praised me as if I was a hero.” She latched onto a new partner, a man 27 years older than her who identified as a woman. In the next three years, Laura underwent a double mastectomy and chest masculinization surgery. She had all her female organs removed. She considered a phalloplasty, a series of cosmetic surgeries to replicate male genitalia using skin from the forearm. At \$100,000, the procedure was too costly. Even though it represented the completion of her transition, in Laura's mind it frightened her.

With each surgery and whenever Laura “passed” as Jake, she said, she felt a euphoric high. But the dysphoria and a deep, lingering depression always returned: “It became a vicious cycle.” As time wore on, Laura grew weary of lying about her childhood, of anxiety over whether she passed as male, of injecting herself with testosterone, of a recurring infection from wearing a male prosthesis, of trying to pee standing up in the men's bathroom and leaking on herself. What promised freedom became a prison cell. “I was haunted by the fact that this wasn't real,” she said.

In 2014, Laura had only heard of one person who had left the transgender lifestyle. She had once mocked him, viewing

him as weak. Seven years into her transition, she felt paralyzed by the realization that she would never be a man.

TODAY, A GROWING NUMBER of individuals who have experienced Laura's haunting realization are breaking their silence and telling heartbreaking stories of detransitioning online. Detransitioning refers to those who medically "transitioned" to the opposite sex but came to regret their decision and realigned with

their biological sex. A Reddit thread for detransitioners that started in 2017 now has nearly 28,000 followers.

March 12 was the second annual Detransition Awareness Day. A support group called Genspect, founded last year by a psychotherapist in Ireland named Stella O'Malley, hosted a Zoom conference for detransitioners that lasted nearly five hours. Another recently formed group, Detrans Voices, posted a Q&A with 14 different detransitioners and desisters

(a term for those who socially transitioned without medical interventions), ages 15 to 35. Throughout the day, the hashtag #DetransitionAwarenessDay was trending on Twitter.

Genspect states on its website, "there are many routes that may lead to the development of distress over an individual's gender ... there are just as many routes out of such distress."

At the start of the Zoom conference, O'Malley said, "It's become blindingly obvious over the last year that ... 'detrans' is a huge part of the trans phenomenon."

A handful of detransitioners shared deeply personal reasons why they transitioned—from online and social influences to autism, mental health issues, childhood trauma, sexual abuse, misogyny, and homophobia. Some expressed anger over doctors, therapists, and other adults who encouraged them to transition, including hormonal and surgical interventions with lasting effects. But when they began experiencing doubt or regret, or realized their underlying problems had not gone away, those same people turned their backs on them.

Despite their increasing visibility, detransitioners are dismissed and undermined amid widespread acceptance of the "affirmative model," which pushes vulnerable youth into puberty-blocking drugs, cross-sex hormones, and invasive surgeries that permanently alter their lives.

In May 2021, a *60 Minutes* episode highlighted personal stories of detransitioners who said medical professionals rushed them into hormonal and surgical interventions at a critically vulnerable point in their lives and they now suffer lifelong effects. The LGBT advocacy group GLAAD slammed the CBS news program for airing the episode, calling it "shameful" and "fearmongering." Chase Strangio of the American Civil Liberties Union labeled it "part of the anti-trans playbook."

Nearly 2 percent of high-school students identify as the opposite sex, and an additional 1.6 percent are unsure whether they are transgender, according to a 2019 survey from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The numbers are increasing: Sweden's Board of Health and Welfare saw a 1,500 percent



increase in gender dysphoria diagnoses among 13- to 17-year-old girls between 2008 and 2018. In England, referrals to the National Health Services' gender identity development clinic rose from 72 in 2009-10 to 2,590 in 2018-19, with 12- to 18-year-olds representing 80 percent of all referrals.

In a 2021 study, published in the *Archives for Sexual Behavior*, researcher and physician Dr. Lisa Littman found that one of the leading reasons for transitioning was a desire to disassociate with one's biological sex. Among those who medically transitioned before 2015, 70 percent who changed their minds were women, according to Littman's study.

"We are the ones who have been wounded by this ... we know the dark secrets," Laura said.

Laura's Desire to Erase her womanhood started long before she typed "girl becoming a boy" into a Google search in her mid-20s. Francine suffered two traumatic late-term miscarriages—boys they named Jeffrey and Nathan—before learning she was pregnant with Laura at an appointment to get her tubes tied. When Laura heard that story as a girl, she already felt a strained relationship with her mom. Francine said she struggled as an overworked mother to connect with Laura, a willful and hyper tomboy who preferred her dad and older brother.

When Laura was 8, her best friend's brother molested her. She knew internally it was wrong but blamed herself and kept it a secret. With little understanding of puberty, Laura spent two years thinking she could be pregnant. When the same boy later rejected her, a seed was planted in Laura, and she began to resent being a girl: "I saw boys as having the power to withhold this incredible gift."

She started dressing in her older brother's hand-me-downs and envisioning herself as a male character in video games and in stories she wrote. She became obsessed with her teddy bear, "Chris," who she imagined listened to all her secrets and knew her as a boy. Laura didn't tell her parents she was molested until age 33.

When she was age 9, a 13-year-old boy took Laura into the woods and made out with her. He inappropriately touched her

on another occasion. She said the shame and secrecy caused her to distance herself from a once-close relationship with her dad.

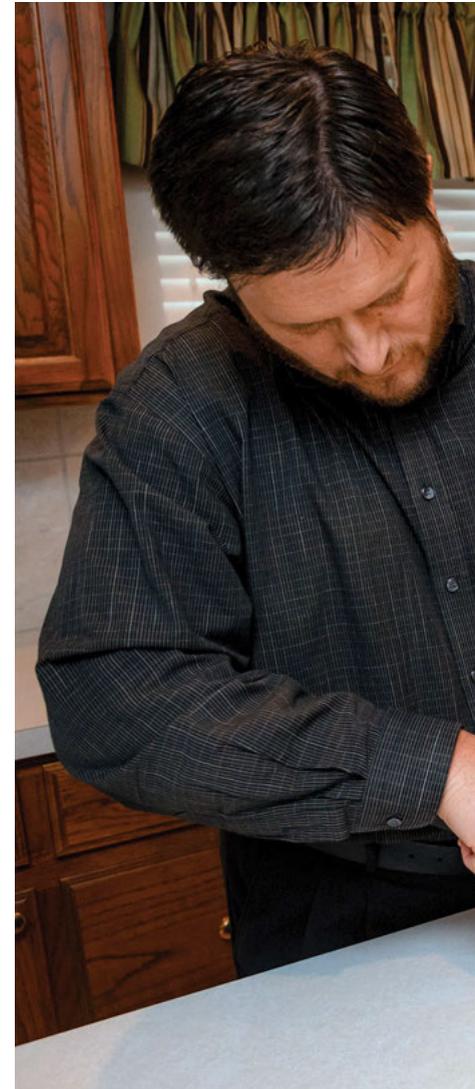
Meanwhile, Laura went through puberty at age 11. She grew to despise her female body as she gained weight and experienced sporadic but painful periods. At 14, Laura experienced a ruptured ovarian cyst and was diagnosed with polycystic ovarian syndrome. A doctor told her she would never have children.

Laura sought more attention from boys and sexual experiences. This set the stage for a series of boyfriends, including one Laura was temporarily engaged to at age 16, who later rejected her. In her late teens and early 20s, Laura became addicted to pornography, dabbled in Satanic rituals, and joined adult hook-up websites, continuing to give herself sexually to men.

During those years, Laura said, the feeling that she should have been a boy never left. In her early 20s, she learned about transgenderism on the internet, including hormonal and surgical interventions that she believed could make her a man. It felt like a dream come true. To obtain cross-sex hormones, Laura was told she had to meet with a therapist three times. At one point, the therapist suggested she had issues with her mother but still signed the papers so Laura could begin taking testosterone.

After Francine and Paul's encounter with Laura at Luby's, they refused to call her Jake and had minimal contact with her. Francine described a "dark pit" of grief akin to losing her daughter. But over time, she said, she came to a place of deep surrender to God and an unexplainable peace. She thrust herself into Bible study and prayer. She started a Bible study with a small group of women with whom she shared openly about Laura and who prayed for her.

The women's Bible study steadily grew, and in 2014, about the time when Laura had become disillusioned with trying to live as Jake, Francine asked her daughter to help create a website in return for payment. As Laura summarized and programmed her mom's studies, her curiosity about the Bible grew. She began asking her mom questions about Scrip-



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Laura prepares dinner with her fiancé, Perry Smalts.

ture and observed how she had changed. “I learned to answer her questions and then hush, instead of wanting to tell her everything,” Francine said.

One night, Laura said a prayer to surrender her life to Christ and to ask forgiveness for her sins. But abandoning her life as Jake did not happen overnight. At first, she told a friend she would become a “man of God.”

The more Laura read the Bible, talked with her parents—Paul began meeting her for lunch once a week—and listened to a Christian radio teacher, the more she felt convicted about her male identity. She said her parents “allowed me grace to wrestle with it all and trusted God.”

Part of the process involved letting go of the mindset that she was a man, Laura said. Other detransitioners

expressed a similar struggle during the March 12 Genspect conference. One question specifically plagued Laura: What name would God call her? Jake or Laura? She realized that God created Laura, but Jake was her own creation. If God created her, she could trust Him to define her.

IN 2016, LAURA EMBRACED God’s design for her as a woman. It meant leaving her partner of eight years, a high-paying tech job, her home in Tulsa, and an identity she lived for nearly a decade. She shaved her beard for the first time in five years. When she stopped taking testosterone, she experienced withdrawal symptoms, including massive headaches that left her curled in a fetal position. She recalls venturing into the women’s clothing section at Kohl’s and trying on a dress. The mir-

ror reflected a flat, hairy chest, a short haircut, and a five o’clock shadow: “I was horrified by what I had done to myself.”

Ladies from Francine’s Bible study supported Laura with encouraging cards and money for a new wardrobe. Her parent’s Baptist church in Bartlesville, Okla., welcomed her in as she moved home. For the first time, Laura developed close-knit female friendships.

Laura scoured the internet for others who had left transgenderism to follow Christ. “I was desperate to know that at least one other person on the planet understood.” She eventually found three people. She connected with one of those individuals over email. Now, Laura says she’s aware of thousands of stories similar to hers.

At age 39, Laura still shaves her face every morning. She will never be able to have children. She has an upcoming appointment to find out if she is a candidate for breast reconstruction surgery. She has suffered from muscle spasms and cognitive and memory loss she believes are connected to taking testosterone. She has back problems stemming from wearing a chest binder every day for years.

But Laura says she has experienced healing and wholeness in Jesus Christ. She travels and tells her story frequently at schools, churches, and women’s and youth conferences. Sometimes, Francine joins her or has opportunities to talk with parents of children who wrestle with gender dysphoria or who live a transgender lifestyle.

Laura works as a women’s ministry intern with First Stone Ministries, an Oklahoma City nonprofit that offers Biblical counseling and support for people experiencing unwanted same-sex attraction or sexual brokenness.

On May 14, Laura is getting married to Perry Smalts, an insurance worker and music minister she met through a church connection.

“My story is not about transgenderism. It is about the gospel,” Laura said. “I didn’t know how to fix myself. I didn’t know how to detransition ... I came to the end of myself, and God redeemed me.” ■