

Interview Code: RJ201316A & RJ201316B
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Interviewee: Abi Jay
Transcriber: Hannah Platt

Working Life [00:00:00-00:11:52]

Abi works at Marks & Spencer and her job allows her to be in role and the company has been wholly supportive of her. Abi has seen a change in the way people respond to her, especially in the workplace. She is not in a situation where people openly laugh at her as they once did, she says most of the time people do not realize 'who or what I am'. She says it is a very small minority of people who continue to make negative comments. Abi says there is an element of things improving in terms of attitude, some people are very intrigued to hear her story.

Childhood & Family [00:11:52 - 00:26:05]

Abi was born in North Middlesex and grew up in northwest London. Her family moved to Essex as they couldn't afford to remain in London. She comes from Polish and Russian descent. Her family was relatively orthodox and attended United Synagogue.

Abi remembers first experiencing a fascination with female things when she visited her grandmothers outfitting shop at the age of 8. She would play with her 2 brothers and eventually she decided to try on some of the women's clothes one evening after being fascinated by them. She also remembers watching all the girls dancing and interacting with each other at family events such as bar mitzvahs and used to join in with the girls rather than boys and always danced effeminately.

Abi's bar mitzvah took place in 1971 she 'loathed going to shul', always had problems with learning difficulties. Her attention would always waiver and she attributes some of this to 'not being me yet'. She started to develop pains in her stomach and abdomen area (doctors decided this was either growing pains or apprehension for her bar mitzvah). Abi developed a stammer, which carried through in to her school days and she was terrified of reading out in class.

The only thing she actively enjoyed from her religion was an organization called the '*Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade*', she joined the brass band and made good friends but still never actively showed how she felt inside. She attended lots of different events with these groups.

Abi comes from a fairly close and large family, particularly with her aunts and uncles. They always shared Holy days together and this led to a close bonding of her and her cousins. Since childhood the only member of older generation family Abi has left is her Mother and describes the family bond today as "*practically non-existent*".

Coming Out & Divorce [00:26:05 – 01:15:20]

Following the first two weeks of coming out Abi had to attend a family engagement party; at this time she was still with her wife and had the task of telling her 2 sons. When she turned up she was petrified of her families reaction but says they "*paid me lip service by saying look we appreciate you coming as a male, we know it's a sacrifice but if you had come as Abi your mother wouldn't have come and your wife wouldn't have come, we are family and we will stick together through this*" At the time

Abi felt upbeat about her situation. Afterwards it became clear that what they said and what they meant were two different things.

Some of the things said to Abi when she came out were 'really hurtful' and she felt as if all the things she had done in her life were wiped out. Her family loved her wife so she feels they thought that she had been selfish by marrying her.

As a teenager Abi collected female clothes she bought and says this would give her elements of guilt, she would bag up the clothes and throw them away and then start the cycle again. She would try and do things that she considered typically male thinking this would make how she felt go away, her choice was football and she exceeded in it.

Abi wasn't confident around women but met her wife thinking that it was going to make the way she felt go away. They were married for 3-4 months before her urges re-appeared. The next attempt Abi made to quash her feelings was to have children, she had her first Son and it didn't make her feelings change. His birth coincided with Abi realizing that her feelings were not going to leave. During this time Abi was made redundant from her job in a jewellers and became a sales manager involving lots of travelling around the country and staying overnight. This led to her going out and buying female clothing and she felt like "*some sort of pervert*". When her second child was born Abi knew the feelings were never going to disappear. She started having fears her children would discover how she behaved when she was not at home.

Abi frequently suffered with pains in her stomach and chest and felt unwell, she was dismissed from hospitals as they could see no physical signs of illness, she decided to visit a clairvoyant after an accidental electrocution. The clairvoyant told Abi she had crossed over to the other side and went on to explain she detected a lot of female inside of Abi who had gone there dressed and behaving as a male.

Abi's wife had once discovered the clothes she had purchased in her business trip bag and they agreed that Abi wouldn't bring them home, with this agreement they would stay together. She visited Manchester on a business trip and discovered Canal Street where she joined a transgendered group. She describes this as her "*evolution*" she would sit in her hotel room after being with friends and dread going home and having to hide who she was. Financially she started to spend more on false business trips in order to be Abi and maxed out several credit cards and borrowed from her mortgage to be able to do so.

Abi's wife began receiving phone-calls one weekend to tell her that her husband was dressing as a woman. One of the directors of Abi's company had hacked in to her facebook account and read all her messages. This led to her sitting down with her two sons and explaining to them what she had been doing. Abi decided to resign from her position following the leak of her private information. Her marriage came to an end and they remained living in the same home, Redbridge council housed her in a flat for 8 months, at this time Abi tried to commit suicide, something within her told her she couldn't do it.

Since coming out Abi has lost the relationship with her eldest son she hasn't spoken with him for 4 years. Her youngest son has since visited with Abi's mother and has a good relationship with Abi.

The Truth Being Revealed [01:15:20 – 01:38:53]

Abi's stomach pains were frequent and she developed a lot of internal bleeding, she soon realized the pains were cyclical once a month and the bleeding seemed to be controlled but started to become consistent. After frequent doctor's visits they decided to explore what could be causing the bleeding. After an MRI scan a doctor at King George's hospital discovered what appeared to be a uterus on Abi's scan. To determine if this was the case more tests were carried out where a radiographer could see what looked like a fallopian tube and a uterine remnant.

On May 4th 2013 doctors decided to perform exploratory surgery to prove their theories about the irregular scan results. They decided that whatever was present in Abi's abdomen would need to be removed to stop the excessive bleeding. Abi didn't want to wake up from her surgery and prayed that she not wake up. In the recovery time period doctor's came to discuss with Abi that they had found a fully-formed womb, cervical cavity along with the previously discovered fallopian tube and she describes this moment *"at that point, everything clicked in to place"*. Abi was born a woman on the inside and says *"everything I had gone through in my life, I was fighting mother nature"*. To Abi this was like God saying *"Abi, wait and see because the truth will come out now"*.

Abi is classed as 'intersex' because she has two sets of working sexual organs so she was able to have children. She is still coming to terms with finding out about her female reproductive organs. Had artificial insemination taken place Abi could have conceived a child and become pregnant but it would not have gone full-term, this is something she has struggled to come to terms with. Abi considers herself bisexual as she has an attraction to both women and men.

Final Thoughts [01:38:53 – 01:49:01]

Abi is looking for a period of stability having had her diagnosis and a very strong spiritual experience, she enjoys mixing in and socializing with people and is in the process of writing her autobiography. Abi hopes to help people with her story. Her hope is that society will change over time despite its image-based orientation. Abi feels lucky because of her intersex status and facial feminization surgery, it makes things easier for her as lots of transsexuals have to purposefully try and act like something that is not necessarily natural for them, to her it comes much easier.

END OF INTERVIEW