

## **SCOTTY: NOT LIMELIGHT, BUT TWILIGHT**

Like many, I am a multifaceted person. One facet is photography, which has become a semi-professional hobby. The photos with the most character are taken in the moments of twilight, sunrises, sunsets, or not far from it.

My other facets include being Catholic, an engineer, a musician, an actor, an outdoorsman, a literary critic, a mentor, and an amateur theologian and historian. I am also a transman, also known as a female-to-male transgender. That's the facet that has tended to be problematic for me and for others. I have always been male, but, when I was young, I was not always seen as such. In fact, there were constant expectations made by those who "knew better" for me to be someone I wasn't, namely a female. I never met those expectations.

I never knew what was "wrong" with me as I was growing up. I was myself as often as I could be, as soon as I could be. I went by male names in grade school. I felt most alive and validated in every moment that I was seen as a boy and called by the correct pronouns. In those moments, I felt that I was in the light and not invisible. When others would take me for my father's son, my dad made a point of correcting them, a way of shaming me and trying to make me stop being so boyish. He was a military officer and having a kid like me embarrassed him.

The onset of female puberty was hell and a half. I hated everything that happened, and was despondent. When I was in seventh grade, I searched the library to find what was "wrong" with me. I didn't find the name for what I was until I went to college and spent a Saturday researching in the library. That's when I found the word transsexual. While it was great to be able to finally name "it," I was also terrified. There was so much stigma and pain to anticipate.

There were moments in my later teenage years and early twenties when I was suicidal. There were many dark nights when I despaired for my future, of ever being able to find employment after finishing my electrical engineering degree, of being alone. My identity was trapped in the eyes of my beholders; my reactions dictated in that split second whether they decided if I was male or female. Job interviews were often decided in that split second. Dating wasn't even a possibility. I was a great friend, but not a romantic prospect.

I started medical intervention at twenty-four, shortly after starting that first job out of college. My first few years of employment were tough. There were no protections and I was the hottest rumor at the company. I had to work harder to

make my performance and my other characteristics more visible than the second puberty I was undergoing.

Presently there is no mistaking that I am male, so that facet, which used to be a blinding, disabling part of my daily existence, is now a shadowy part of my history. But I bear the physical scars; anatomical differences compared to a cis-gendered man; the memories of a frustrated youth, of being invisible in my own life; the emotional scars and wounds, some of which lie dangerously close to the surface. I wouldn't be the man I am without them.

As a Catholic, I am somewhere between a convert and revert. My parents were both raised Catholic, but I didn't know that until I was almost fifteen. I grew up between my dad's hostility towards religion and my mom's exploration of different faith traditions. When I was eight, I was baptized and received my First Communion in the Episcopal Church. However, when I was a sophomore in high school, my parents told me that I was supposed to be Catholic, sent me to Confirmation classes and I was confirmed the following spring and taking the name Patrick.

In college, I drifted back to the Episcopal Church. When I finally went back to the Catholic Church at the age of 30, it was a breeze. I had been confirmed, never married, and I didn't feel the need to volunteer my past at the re-entrance interview. Subsequent confessions, where I did mention that I was trans, did not go poorly. While I was consistently the "first one" that each priest knew that they'd spoken to, they were all kind, and sent the message of "go forth and live." I stayed quietly in the shadows.

I lived what trans folks call a 'stealth' existence for years. Eventually, I met Sister Luisa Derouen, a Catholic nun who ministered to the trans community. I started dating a woman who would not let me stay in my shell. In large part because of them I started to expand my horizons, confronting issues over friendships, stealth, intimacy, and my own sexual orientation that I'd left buried.

Having Sister Luisa in my life was a Godsend. Not only did she become my spiritual director, she became a beloved friend. She challenged me to accompany her to a national Catholic gay and lesbian ministry conference. One of the speakers was a Mexican bishop. I have never met a man who so personified Jesus incarnate. He was loving, accepting, and had an uncanny knack for appearing, seemingly out of nowhere, to personally talk with people. Later, I had an opportunity to speak to him. Our conversation was one of the most spiritual I've experienced. I felt enveloped by the Church after that weekend.

Two months later, at a Christmas address to the curia, Pope Benedict made comments that slammed the church door in my face, saying that there needed to be an ecology of the human race, and those like me needed to be pruned like weeds from the rainforest. To say I've been heartbroken is an understatement.

I once attended a lecture by a rabbi regarding Jewish tradition and gender. The Hebrew language in the Talmud allows for six different genders, including intersex. The rabbi explained that Hebrew thought and language makes allowances for things that are neither one nor the other, such as day and night. This was important in many ways, including defining the parameters of the Sabbath. The language for the other genders that were not fully male or female was akin to the language that defines twilight...not the fullness of day or night, but a beautiful space in between that is both and neither, but distinct, beautiful, and of God.

The photographer in me has seized that concept. I am twilight, I am a sunrise, I am a sunset. I am not a weed to be pruned. I am not "less than." I am my history; I contain the shadows and the light of what I have seen. I am a physical living embodiment of that moment that allows for striking images, fleeting visions and perspectives that are not possible during the fullness of day or night. I am of God and I have beauty in this world that can only be viewed by those who choose to seek it.