



Just another GUY

FEATURED
TOPIC

Senior Tyler Billett starts to feel comfortable in his own skin

Landon Hudson / Editor in Chief

It was the start of senior Tyler Billett's sophomore year. He was at home in pajamas, about to get dressed for band practice when an intense feeling of discomfort entrapped him. He held his chest, upset with the way it looked. Gasping for air, he knew what was wrong. For the first time, he was experiencing severe unhappiness with his body and gender.

Tyler was born in a body that feels wrong to him. Specifically, Billett is a transgender male.

When he was young, he knew he didn't fit the female mold. Instead of skirts and dresses, he preferred more masculine clothing. He took pride in the tag, "tomboy".

"I always felt uncomfortable with my body and my identity when I presented as a female," Billett said, anxiously twitching his leg.

Billett attended Grand Haven Christian School (GHCS) through the eighth grade. He never had much exposure to different sexualities or genders and felt sheltered to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) issues.

"I had no idea about it," Billett said. "I didn't know it was a thing you could do, I don't want to say 'choose', but that you could be a gender other than what you were assigned."

Despite feeling like he was pretending to be something he wasn't, Billett tried dressing more feminine for a while, hoping it might just be a phase.

"I was trying to dress and act more feminine and I'm not sure if it was because I wanted to or if I was trying to convince myself that this wasn't a thing because I didn't want it to happen," Billett said. "So I was just kind of like, 'Okay this is not really what I want to do'. So I completely started dressing more masculine and anything that I wore that was feminine I stopped wearing."

It wasn't until tenth grade when Billett started coming to terms with what he was feeling. As a junior, he began the long transition to present as male. He opted to cut his hair and now sports a short faded blue style.

One of the first big changes was Billett's band concert uniform. He's been in the marching band all throughout high school. Band has been a large part of his life since fifth grade when he began playing the clarinet.

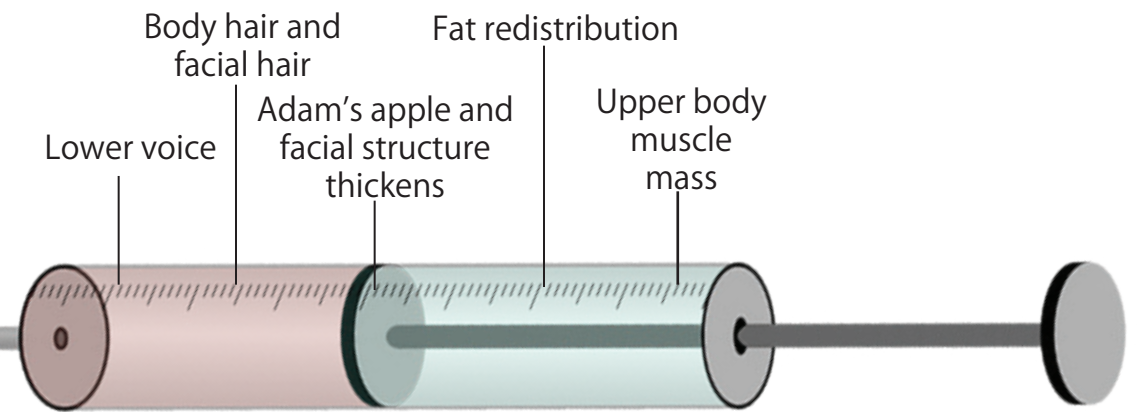
"I talked to my band director and was like, 'Okay, here's what's going on with my gender, can I not wear the female uniform, can I wear the male uniform instead?'. That wasn't a problem. But he was like, 'Okay, I can't just do this, you have to talk to your parents about it'. And that's when I came out to my parents.

Billett's mother, Mary, shared she wasn't very surprised when she found out, but wanted him to be open with her about what he was going through.

"I remember Tyler seemed like he wanted to tell me something, but was hesitant," Mary said. "I just tried to be patient and kept assuring him there wasn't anything he could tell me that would make me not love him. Eventually he found the words and he was comfortable enough to get the message across that he was not comfortable in his body."

Effects of testosterone

Testosterone is a sex hormone naturally produced in a man's testicles, small amounts are produced in woman's ovaries



Graphics by Landon Hudson

When Billett began his transition, he identified as gender-fluid. Gender-fluid describes someone that whose gender varies over time. They can choose to identify as female, male, neutrois, a non-binary identity or a combination of any thereof.

“There were some days where I was okay with female pronouns and my birth name and presenting female where other days I was more in the middle and I didn’t want to present as either and other times I was uncomfortable with male identification,” Billett said. “It changes, it’s not necessarily set.”

Who he is

Not all coming out stories have been as positive as Billett’s. Billett considers his parents’ reactions abnormal compared to what others have shared.

“Most people’s parents I would say are definitely not as supportive as mine and I was lucky that they were so proactive with getting me the help and things that I needed,” Billett said. “A lot of parents, from the stories

I’ve heard, try to ignore it, tell their kids that they’re going through a phase, and generally try to shut it down by doing whatever they can and making their kids feel bad about it.”

Ever since Billett was young, he persisted he was a boy. Mary knows this isn’t just a temporary decision, it’s who he is as a person. She and his dad, Warren, have continued to love and support him through the changes he’s undergone.

“I wish others would understand this is not a choice people make, or something they do to get attention,” Mary said. “It’s not a phase or a fad, or something to be outgrown. It’s about not feeling legitimate in your own skin, and it’s real. Also, the embarrassment they feel when misgendered can be devastating, whether it’s intentional or not. You are not going to prove anything by deliberately misgendering someone, except that you yourself are either disrespectful or just plain ignorant.”

Billett’s parents were determined to help their son through his transition, doing whatever they could to help him.

“To be honest, it probably took us longer to take many

of the steps we took than it should have,” Mary said. “But we went to the counselor he chose, especially since he was concerned we would take him to a Christian counselor who would try to ‘fix’ him. We changed the name we called him, (there has been a progression of a few before he was sure). Most difficult, we changed pronouns and began referring to him as our son.”

Mary said. “It hurts my heart that because of the current policies against trans people in the armed services, he most likely will not be able to make that dream a reality. It would be one thing if he just didn’t make the cut, but he actually has the brains and capabilities to have a pretty good chance. Now we’ll never know because of government policies, and that just isn’t right.”

GLOSSARY

Trangender

gender doesn’t match the sex assigned at birth

Transition

process of switching to identified gender

Bisexual

attraction to both binary genders

Gender non-binary

identifying with a gender other than male or female

Dysphoria

extreme discomfort with body

Big steps

After months of attending therapy sessions so he could receive professional approval, on April 20, 2015 the family travelled to Chicago so Billett could receive his first shot of testosterone.

“It was a big step,” Billett said. “There was that feeling of excitement, I couldn’t believe this was actually happening, it was a big deal, but there was also nervousness because there are several ways you can get testosterone but I knew the way that would work best would be injections.”

Billett’s experienced anxiety with needles in the past and it took almost a half hour before his nerves settled. But he’s had to adjust to the injections since he’s administered three milliliters of testosterone every Monday in the

care of his own home.

“There’s no really end to transition especially with testosterone,” Billett said. “If you want to keep having the effects of testosterone you don’t really ever stop taking them. You get testosterone for the rest of your life.”

The next step for Billett is a legal name change. This would usually take around three weeks, but the financial aspect has delayed the process. As a result, Billett will not apply to college until the change is official.

“I could just notify the college, but that’s going to be a pain in the butt and I don’t really feel comfortable with that especially with some of the colleges I’m looking at applying to,” Billett said. “As much as it sucks, I don’t really want it to hurt my chances. Not that I want to hide it, but I don’t know if I’m comfortable with pointing it out.”

Mary is disheartened by the idea that Billett’s future could be impacted by his gender.

“Looking forward, Tyler’s dream has always been to join the Air Force and be part of the NASA mission to Mars,”

Long way to happiness

Billett quietly sits in the back of the AP Lit classroom, solving a rubik’s cube between his fingers. He clears his throat before raising his hand to contribute to the discussion. He speaks fast. Usually reserved around his classmates, it will take him awhile before he truly ever feels comfortable.

Billett has come a long way to be more content with his gender and bisexuality, but still has rough days where he feels overwhelmed.

“I’ll just have days where it’s really upsetting and I’ll feel really dysphoric,” Billett said. “It doesn’t go away, because you can’t really change anything about it. My perception of myself and the uncomfortableness I have with myself, the stress gets to me.”

Billett finds comfort in the friends he’s met through the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) club. He has been an active member since he moved to GHHS his freshman year. Most of Billett’s former classmates attended West Michigan Christian after completing GHCS so he was offered a fresh start. He now holds the title of club president.

The club’s goal is to educate peers and promote acceptance throughout the student body. Billett’s girlfriend, senior Sierra Lewis is also a part of GSA and has known him since freshman year.

“Tyler’s really intelligent and pretty funny, he’s really open minded,” Lewis said. “He does a lot of things to connect the club, he wants to spread awareness.”

Billett wants to emphasize that LGBTQ+ students are the same as everyone else.

“It sounds like a cliché thing to say, but honestly that’s the biggest problem,” Billett said. “I feel like a lot of the kids who come to GSA are often times treated like outsiders like they’re different than everyone else. I feel like that’s the major problem is just that ignorance and lack of understanding.”

Despite the struggles he’s faced along the way, Billett has realized he needs to put his happiness first.

“I feel like it’s important to do what makes you happy regardless of what other people think of you,” Billett said, smiling. “I feel like people need to put themselves first, not in a selfish way, but what’s important is that you’re doing what you’re comfortable with, you’re being who you are and that you’re happy.”