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Camp Aranu'tiq: Notes from the First Camp for Transgender and Gender Variant Youth

Nick M. Teich, LCSW, PhD

When I was about five years old, I told my parents I wished to be a boy and to have my hair cut short. They obliged. But because I didn't have access to the knowledge that gender transition from female to male existed, minor modifications like hair and clothes were the best I could do. I had not yet fully realized that my expressed desire to be a boy was "real," or even possible.

Some of the most positive experiences of my life were as a camper from 1993 to 1999, as a counselor from 2000 to 2003, and as a member of the leadership team from 2005 to 2006, all at the same summer camp in Maine. Despite the fact that it was an all-girls' camp, for me this was a place where I could be myself—a far cry from how I felt at school. I looked forward to the late June start, and I even had a calendar on which I counted down the days. I told my parents after that first summer that I wanted to be a camp director. Both of them had attended camps as kids, so it was important to them that their children do the same.

I accepted that society considered me a girl and remember happily shopping for my camp uniform before my first summer: white polo shirts, white T-shirts, and blue shorts. There was nothing particularly feminine about this clothing, which, in hindsight, may have been a factor in my choosing that particular camp. Over time, I was completely accepted for being an "ultra-tomboy." The effect camp had on me was profound, and most others around me shared that feeling. Over 20 years later, the friends I made there are still some of my closest.

When circumstances precluded my returning to the camp in Maine, I began volunteering each year at a weeklong charity camp. Several years later, I realized that I needed to move forward with transition. I had been very depressed and could not figure out why I felt so out of place. I was 24 when I first met another trans man, and a couple of months later I was on the road to transition, knowing full well that this was the missing piece of me. When I disclosed my intention to transition to the staff at camp, the initial response was positive. Several board members even told me that they were "happy" for me. But events

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