**The voice of my son, who was my daughter**

*This I know: My child is very much alive. And happy. And starting to love himself,* ***Lori Bona Hunt****writes.*

I heard him sing for the first time the other night, and there were tears. Tears of joy and pride, and of other things.

It's a beautiful voice – rich, deep and melodic – somewhere between an alto and a tenor.

The voice of my son. The son who was my daughter – my daughter who sang soprano. My daughter who was a lesbian, which I got, but who is not now, which is hard to get.

My daughter was 12 when she first came out. It was not a revelation. I knew she was gay around Grade 4. She started crushing on girls the way I remember crushing on boys at that same age. She was always a girly girl, and she matured into a striking beauty – a "lipstick lesbian," some would say.

Her sexual orientation was a non-issue in our non-traditional family. Her father and I split when she was 6, but we remain close friends. We are free thinkers, with open-minded-to-radical parents of our own. Our tangled family dynamic includes liberal and supportive grandparents, step-parents, step-siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins.

But outside our home, there were bumps. Her junior high school wasn't ready for a Grade 7 student who wore Gay Pride T-shirts and rainbow wristbands.

She endured teasing and bullying, sending me into protective Mama Bear mode more than once.

The other complexities and complications of adolescence soon followed. There were girlfriends – too old and too young – and admiring boys who needed explanations. But also body dismay and dysmorphia, cutting and hair-pulling, anxiety and self-loathing. Years of therapists, psychiatrists, specialists, medications and more. No determined cause of her angst, the experts said. Just stay alive, I begged more than once. Be happy. Love yourself.

And then, university – finally a haven. Enveloped by the fellow artistic and eclectic, she thrived. There was talk of the future, even happiness. Then, suddenly, recently, changes. No dresses or makeup one month; hormone shots the next. Two injections and the soprano was gone.

Wait! What? Why? And why now? No waiting? No warnings?

It was a curveball I never saw coming. No fair! I was looking – I was! Always asking questions, being there, seeking expert advice. Hey, all you specialists: Why didn't you see? And my partner! Twenty years my senior with a transgender child of his own, now nearly 40. Back before Caitlyn Jenner, they'd navigated uncharted and choppy waters.

Surely he knew! No?

But. But. But.

But she is a lesbian. A woman.

And such a pretty one. And that voice, that angelic voice.

But. But. But.

But there is no pattern, said the nurse at the clinic that gives the testosterone shots. Sometimes people are 5 when they decide, sometimes 75.

Why does it matter? What is gender anyway? It doesn't matter. It doesn't. Then why this deep ache?

I make mistakes, call out the feminine birth name before I remember. I fumble with the pronouns. Remember to think before you speak! I am ashamed of myself, being a liberal and all.

I am embarrassed to admit that I am grieving, I'm mourning. I am not sure why. My child is the same person, who just looks and sounds different.

It starts so early, the gender thing. Before they are even here: "What are you having – a boy or a girl?" Birth certificates, passports, school records, check M or F, one or the other. Maybe some things – social norms, stereotypes and such – are buried so deep that even the self-professed politically correct don't know they're there. You have to dig to carve them out, lift them to the surface for examination. Maybe that's why it hurts and leaves scars.

Things are changing, I know.

New definitions, new pronouns, expanded categories on government forms. Maybe it will change how and when these things are ingrained. I hope.

Much reflection and worry. I am back on cub patrol. I stare down border agents who do a double-take. "It's an old passport photo," I say, daring them to ask. I wait outside the men's washroom just in case, tell my partner to keep watch in public change rooms. And after Orlando, the anguish of Orlando: "Where are you going, with whom and when?" This I know: My child, my son, is very much alive. And happy.

And starting to love himself. He feeds his new body, lifts weights and runs. He stands so tall while singing now, so confident, so sure. All I ever wanted.

Some 22 years ago, an ultrasound suggested a girl was on the way. I decorated the nursery in bold colours, mostly red.

"Why?" my mother asked. "Why, when you know, not pink or even yellow?" I scoffed – the very idea. We don't do stereotypes.

And my father-in-law, so disappointed the first grandchild would not be a boy: "Gender doesn't matter," I told him.

"Wait and see." Of course, I was right. That grandchild was – is – his everything.

It doesn't matter. So walk the talk, Mama Bear.

A beautiful voice is a beautiful voice.

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