A new man

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How far would you go to feel comfortable in your own skin? Would you spend thousands of dollars for muscle damaging chest binders, ongoing rounds of shots or undergo invasive surgery? For Charlie Poulson, a junior in graphic design, none of these are questions. Instead these expensive treatments and sometimes risky procedures have been milestones that proudly mark his life as a transgender male, and all of them have been worth it.

Born a female in biology only, Poulson is now nearing the end of a long journey to alter his physical form to match the person he really is. As with many transgender individuals, Charlie’s journey began when he was a small child. At 12 years old, Poulson asked his mom if there was a surgery to make him a boy and she tenderly responded “you’re too young for that.” It wasn’t a no so Poulson stayed hopeful and decided to dress in boyish outfits instead. For this Charlie endured early teasing and criticism but stayed strong growing up knowing that both come from challenging what people consider normal and that in the end they result in a stronger person.

Some years later he legally changed his name to Charlie and began watching hundreds of YouTube videos of people who shared the feeling of being a prisoners in their own bodies. It was after one such video that Poulson had a lightbulb moment, and after some more research, he found that there was an alternative to immediate surgery. Poulson says it was like the “clouds parted, it rained skittles, and unicorns descended from rainbows,” because all it would take was a little help from shots of the hormone testosterone, or “T” as Poulson now calls it, to bring him closer to manhood.

It was nearly a year ago that he started his own self-administered regimen that includes shots of testosterone and a hormone cocktail specifically engineered for his body but it has given him quite dramatic results. He now sports facial hair along with a fair amount of muscle tone and a much deeper voice but it wasn’t all an instant success. Poulson says he “felt like a monster in his own skin” admitting that while he might’ve been ready to be a man mentally, his body felt otherwise, and the first four months of the shots were difficult as his body adjusted to the influx of hormones. An internal balance was achieved over time and Poulson felt that he had become a man after this time of puberty.

After successfully adapting to the testosterone Poulson then looked to the next step in his transition: Top surgery. As one might guess, this is a physical transition of the upper body that removes the fatty tissue on a females chest to reveal a more “male” physique. It’s a $5,900 surgery, plus airfare and a week-long hotel stay for the immediate recovery time, which is a major portion from his college-student budget. So he decided to raise money with the help of his best friend Alison Gamm by turning his old shirts, which are now too small because of his muscle gain, into bracelets to sell. Dubbing their philanthropic endeavor “Save Charlie” to signify saving him from the body he has been trapped in for 20 years the two posted fliers around campus and after one month of selling the bracelets has raised over $1,200. Poulson says that every transition is different and that top surgery will be the end of his journey choosing not to pursue the surgery to transition the lower half of his body. Instead he will continue his shot regiment and would like to thank everyone who has shown support for his cause over the years. It’s been a long road but for this new man salvation is finally in sight. ALLISON BUTLER

(Charlie is scheduled for surgery on May 10th of next year. If you’d like to support him “Save Charlie” bracelets can be purchased at The Sloss House Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

DESIGN: KATELYN REYNOLDS
PHOTO: ALISON GAMM