

TRANS— CENDENCE

As vice president of Trans-Cendence International, Paula Ellis knows what it means to struggle with gender identity. From depression to divorce to transitioning, this is her story.

For the first 50 years of her life, Paula Ellis was living a lie. Everything was fake. Her 25 Facebook friends. Her 17-year long marriage. Almost every single human interaction.

The entire world was telling her that she was a man.

Every day, they told her she was immoral, so she accepted that she was immoral. But after 50 years, Ellis could simply not take it anymore.

When the panic attacks and anxiety got to her, Ellis knew there was no feeling in the world that could be worse.

In 2013, she attempted to take her own life.

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Ellis always knew she was different. Growing up, she had issues. She spent her time trying to be what the world told her she was.

Ellis asked herself the same question every time she interacted with someone: "What would a dude do in this situation?"

She knew it wasn't right, but for her entire childhood, she didn't know how to fix it.

The first time transitioning even crossed her mind was when she was 18, but there were two problems: it was 1981 and she was living in Texas. To Ellis, transitioning seemed like an excellent way to get herself get herself killed.



BREAKING THE MOLD Transgender rights activist Paula Ellis spoke to the crowd and marched at the Dallas Women's March Jan. 20 alongside 7,000 other women.

Because she didn't identify as gay, Ellis had no connection to the gay community. The only transgender people she knew of were rich or famous. Any program she could find to help transgender people was being shut down. There was no one who could help her.

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Responding the way men did was not natural to me. I tried to be what the world said I was. It was terrible.”

— Paula Ellis

Ellis did what she was supposed to do. She got married. She spent 17 years pretending to be a happy man, a devoted husband. But it was too much.

After she survived her attempted suicide, she knew she had to transition. But the moment she mustered up the courage to come out as transgender, her wife wanted nothing to do with her. She began losing friends and colleagues. People were shutting her out of their lives.

Ellis was still miserable.

"I realized that I was either going to do this or die," Ellis said. "I thought I'd probably die, to be honest, because I'd waited so long. I realized I would try this, and if it was better then I wouldn't kill myself."

Over the last five years, Ellis's life has turned around. Now presented as a female to the rest of the world, she feels okay with herself, with her body. She's real.

When she was little, Ellis was petrified of speaking in front of people. Now, she's the Vice President of Trans-Cendence International, a support organization for transgender people and their loved ones.

With a mission of keeping families together, what Ellis and the organization want most is for people to understand that transgender women are no different than any other.

"Transgender people are who we say we are," Ellis said. "We go to great effort to be authentic and to be real. The way the world perceives us when we're younger, that's the act."

And now, a happier woman than she's ever been before, Paula Ellis interacts with people from all backgrounds, and has more than 1300 friends on Facebook.

"For the last five years, I've transitioned, and my life is a whole lot better now," Ellis said. "It's not like everything's perfect, but I feel much better. My interactions with people feel real. They're not fake, they're not forced, I'm just me, and it's wonderful."

THE ORGANIZATION

Paula Ellis is vice president and Dallas Chapter Director of Trans-Cendence International.

Mission: To support transgender people and their loved ones and keep families together. Give people a place to talk about their problems.

Who: The organization is open to those who identify as transgender, those who are thinking about questions of gender and those who support the transgender community.

Where: Trans-Cendence is currently located in Dallas, Fort Worth, Denton and Oklahoma City.

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