

## The Shrine

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Nearly thirteen years have passed since my son "came out" to me as transgender. I have been surprised at how straightforward and uncomplicated some aspects of Caden's gender transition went. For the most part, our family rallied around him. I was delighted (and a bit surprised) at how supportive Caden's elderly grandparents were, when I told them.

I feel grateful for the friends and family who showed their love and support for Caden, and for our entire family, by simply accepting Caden and supporting our decision to love and affirm our child. A few relatives have cruelly clung to Caden's "old" name as a sign of disapproval. They must not realize how much their stubbornness stings.

Other aspects of Caden's transition were especially difficult, though...

One of the most painful challenges I faced was balancing my unconditional support for Caden with my sadness at losing a cherished daughter. At times, Caden, with his new name and new gender seemed like an altogether different person.

My feelings were amplified when Caden would present me with his awards, trophies and other childhood mementos and gently say, "Mom, I don't want this anymore because it has my old name and that is not my name now. I know you will want to save it though." Each piece I carefully placed in a box on the floor of my closet where I began to acquire a hidden "shrine" to my "daughter".

Today, that "shrine" is safely tucked away, deep in my closet. I no longer sort through the items it contains, mourning the loss of a daughter. The blank spaces on my walls and my shelves, and most importantly, in my heart, have been replaced, full of new photos and new memories.

As the years have passed, I have come to realize that in all the ways that really matter, Caden is still the same person. He may have a new name and a different gender but he is still the same child I always cherished.

He still loves to take long bike rides with me. We still browse in bookshops and libraries together for hours on end, like before. We still spend leisurely mornings eating breakfast together in the summer - herbal tea for him and black coffee for me. He still drenches his waffles in way too much maple syrup. He still loves animals, like always, especially dogs.

While our relationship has changed in remarkable ways, Caden and I have been able to maintain the special bond that I had always treasured. But in those first difficult weeks and months, I did not yet realize this was possible and my sense of loss was palpable.