

UNHEARD VOICES

Stories of LGBT History



Jamison Green: Transgender Activist

Introduction to the Interview (Running Time 2:03)

Jamison Green is an activist and writer who has worked on behalf of transgender men and women for more than 20 years.

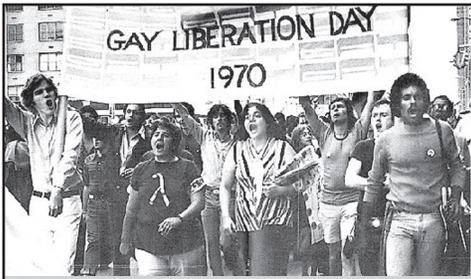
Jamison transitioned from female to male in 1988. Here, he speaks with his daughter, Morgan Green, about what life was like for him as a child.

Questions to Discuss with Students Following the Interview

- Green says, “I think I really consciously felt different my first day of kindergarten.” Have there been times that you have felt different? How did you feel? In your school, what differences are noticed the most amongst students? In what ways might students be treated based on their differences? What are some ways that you can help other students who may feel different?
- Green talks about growing up as a girl and always hating to wear dresses. What are the things that our society expects girls to wear and do? What are the things that our society expects boys to wear and do? Were there ever times that you did not conform to gender expectations? If so, how were you received by those around you?
- How does Green describe his first day of kindergarten? Why were the boys and girls in the class separated? Do you think there are activities that only girls or only boys should do? Where you ever discouraged from doing something you liked because of your gender?
- When someone suggested to Green that he might be transsexual, he says he “reacted in complete horror.” Why do you think he was so scared? What messages had he received growing up that made him afraid to even explore the idea of transitioning? What messages have you received (from family, friends, media, school, places of worship) about transgender people?
- When Green saw Steve Dain on television, what was his reaction? How did that moment impact him? Why is it important to know role models, historic figures and successful people with whom we can identify?
- Green says, “I didn’t feel that I could actually be an honest, whole person in my relationship[s]...if I didn’t transition.” What do you think he means by this? Why is it important to be able to be your true self? Why does Green’s daughter say that she is “probably a better person” as a result of her father’s decision to transition?

Suggested Activities and Assignments for Extended Learning

- Assign students to research the history of the use of the colors pink and blue to designate newborn babies' gender in the U.S. Ask them to answer the following questions: When did labeling of newborn babies with pink and blue start and why? Have the color designations always been the same? Why do hospitals label babies in this way? As time allows, have students identify and research other gender-specific customs that are taken for granted. Discuss how these seemingly benign practices may actually reinforce gender role expectations and stereotypes.
- Assign students to analyze gender expectations (names, clothing, professions, roles, etc.) in U.S. culture and to create a visual representation of their findings. Students can be encouraged to make collages from magazine advertisements, toy catalogues and photos or create videos from media clips.
- Ask students, individually or in groups, to research transgender and gender non-conforming historical figures and to present their findings to the class. Subjects might include Sylvia Rivera, Joan of Arc, Billie Tipton, Christine Jorgensen, Miss Major, Chaz Bono, Kate Bornstein, Kim Coco Iwamoto, Jamison Green and We'Wha.
- In groups, ask students to research the barriers that transgender people face in the U.S or in your community. Some topics to cover may be name changes on official government documents (birth certificates, driver's licenses, etc.), safe and accessible restrooms and locker rooms, participation in gender-segregated athletics, and experiences with bullying and name-calling.
- Green was teased at school by his peers for not conforming to assigned gender expectations. Ask students to analyze what ways their school or school district works to support and protect students regardless of gender identity or expression. Have students find the answers to the questions below and then generate a few recommendations for improving school climate around gender issues that can be presented to school administrators:
 - Does your school or school district specifically mention gender identity and gender expression in the code of conduct, student handbook or anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies?
 - Is there a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) or similar club on campus that focuses on the needs of transgender students?
 - Does the school's dress code specify different rules for boys and girls?
 - What gendered spaces exist on your campus (e.g., classes, P.E., sports, locker rooms, clubs, prom) and what are the options and/or consequences for students who wish to transgress those boundaries?
- Get your students involved! Work with the school GSA or local advocacy group to learn about the needs of transgender people in your community. If possible, encourage students to join groups or volunteer for local non-profits working to address transgender issues.



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Student Handout



Jamison Green

According to 1629 Virginia court records, Thomasina Hall—who was born female, but often dressed in male clothing—was brought to court by fellow villagers who were confused about his gender. After an examination, the court pronounced that Hall was both male and female, ordering him to wear female headgear and an apron over his male clothing to mark his dual identity.

Transgender people have always existed, though language to describe them was not coined until the 1900s. As far back as the sixth century, for example, King Henry III of France frequently cross-dressed, preferring to be addressed as “her majesty” by his subjects when in female attire. In the seventeenth century, Queen Christina of Sweden dressed in men’s clothing and renamed herself Count Dohna. And in 1886, We’Wha—a Native American weaver and potter, who was born male but lived as a woman—met with President Grover Cleveland, who may never have realized this six-foot Zuni maiden was born male.

When Jamison Green was born in 1948, he was labeled “female.” He was adopted by a family that was excited to have a baby girl, and was given a female name accordingly. However, Jamison never felt like a girl. “I think I really consciously felt different my first day of kindergarten,” remembers Jamison. “I always hated wearing dresses, but my parents dressed me up and we walked in...The kindergarten teacher welcomed me and she said, ‘The little girls are over here.’ But as soon as I saw the guys with the trucks I went right over there in my little dress and started playing with these two kids.”

At about the time that Jamison was starting school, Christine Jorgensen—born George Jorgensen—became a media sensation after traveling to Denmark for sex reassignment surgery. In a front-page story entitled “Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty,” it was reported that Jorgensen was the recipient of the first “sex change” operation. The claim was not true, as German doctors had pioneered this type of surgery more than twenty years earlier, but Christine was the most visible transsexual that the U.S. had seen to date.

This visibility provided little reassurance to young Jamison. As he grew older, people often had difficulty determining the sex of the masculine child wearing a dress, and they would treat him as an object of ridicule. “As I got to be about thirteen, fourteen,” recalls Jamison, “I made my mother uncomfortable in that I looked so much like a boy and seemed so much like a boy and played football with the boys...” At fifteen, he took a male name and started going by “Jamie.”

In the 1960s people like Jamison had few rights. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people were routinely subjected to police brutality and raids of gay bars, public parks and even gatherings in private homes. Laws were enacted against cross-dressing and even dancing with a member of the same gender. Few social establishments welcomed LGBT people.

Gene Compton’s Cafeteria in San Francisco was usually a safe haven for LGBT people. One evening in

1966, however, the manager called the police on a table of loud transgender customers. When an officer got rough with one of the women and tried to arrest her, she threw a hot cup of coffee in his face. The transgender community was sick and tired of mistreatment, and violence erupted and spilled onto the street. The building's windows were smashed, a police car was destroyed and a newspaper stand was set on fire. The first recorded transgender riot in U.S. history marked a turning point in the struggle for LGBT rights, resulting in new social and health services for the transgender community in the years to come.

Jamison—in his early 20s during this time—knew he was probably transsexual, but was afraid to seek treatment. When his partner at the time suggested surgery to help him transition from female to male, Jamison was horrified. “Only crazy people do that! Don’t you ever talk about that again,” he responded. “I believed that I would lose all my friends and...that I would never get a job and...it would be a total disaster.”

As Jamison reached his 30s, living as a woman became unbearable for him, but transitioning still didn't seem like an option. “I...didn't know that it was possible until I saw someone else who had transitioned from female to male on television in 1976,” remembers Jamison. “I saw Steve Dain. He had been a teacher of the year in California and he went away over the summer break and came back as a man. And he wanted to keep his teaching job. He was handsome, articulate, self-confident, poised. And I thought, ‘That’s me if I’m successful. I could be him.’”

Steve Dain helped Jamison to accept that he could live life as a man. His role as a parent also impacted his desire to transition. He had two children with his partner at the time. According to Jamison, “I didn't feel that I could actually be an honest, whole person in my relationship with [them]...if I didn't transition.” Jamison began the process of transitioning and was listed as the “father” on his children's birth certificates. By April 1991, Jamison was legally male and his own birth certificate was corrected to reflect his rightful gender.

In 1993 two pivotal events occurred. Brandon Teena, a transgender teen from Nebraska, was brutally raped and murdered by peers who had discovered that he was biologically female. This hate crime brought widespread attention to transgender discrimination and violence, and became the subject of the award-winning film, *Boys Don't Cry*. In the same year, Minnesota became the first state to pass a statewide law prohibiting discrimination against transgender people.

By that time Jamison had already become a leading voice for transgender rights through his involvement with FTM International—the world's largest group for female-to-male transgender people—and through his work on the passage of San Francisco's Transgender Protection Ordinance. Since then, Jamison has worked for numerous transgender organizations, appeared in many documentary films and wrote a book entitled *Becoming a Visible Man*.

Today, efforts to create safer and more accepting communities for transgender people are needed more than ever. The 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey indicates that transgender people experience higher rates of harassment, unemployment, housing discrimination and homelessness than the general population. According to the study, an alarming 78% of transgender youth reported harassment by peers, leading 15% of these students to leave school.

Due to the efforts of Jamison and many other activists, transgender people are gaining more visibility and support with each passing year. As of this writing, thirteen states and the District of Columbia now have non-discrimination protections for transgender people, and schools and workplaces across the country are adapting to meet the needs of their transgender members. In 2006, Kim Coco Iwamoto—a member of Hawaii's Board of Education—became the first openly transgender official to win statewide office, an achievement that Jamison could never have imagined when he toddled into his kindergarten class in a dress a few short decades ago.