



## **Nina's Story :- Girls are Welcome... Boys are not!**

*Eleven year old Nina has always lived in the wrong body. But it was a long battle with parents teachers and others before she could stop being known as 'David'.*

When she hated the situation so much that she wanted to die, she collected all her courage and called the head teacher of her elementary school. *"If I cannot come to school as a girl, I will not come to school at all"* she told him. The head teacher hesitated before replying. Nina waited, pressing the telephone to her ear and holding her breath. In total silence she stood in the living room of the bright newly built apartment on the outskirts of Cologne – an eleven year old child with straw blonde hair, trying to blackmail her head teacher. Nina goes to Class 4b dressed as a boy, but at home she loves to wear skirts, ringlet stockings and dances in her room to the music of Mark Medlock and Rihanna – a pretty girl! Yet she does not have a girl's body. Instead her birth certificate says 'male' next to her name 'David'. *"A mistake"* says Nina, *"I am a GIRL!"* She has fought for years to be known as a girl – Nina, yet until a few months ago she was David. Everyone saw her as a boy – her mother, father, her younger sister, doctors, teachers, neighbours, other children in her class. When she went to school she had to wear boys' pants.

She should be happy, said her father, that occasionally she might be allowed to play dress up and wear a skirt at home. But she should not play with Barbies – they were definitely not for boys! When her parents bought her a 'Ken' boy doll, she threw it into the corner in disgust. *"That is so stupid!"* she screamed. She made such a fuss that eventually her mother gave up and bought her a girl Barbie. Her parents hoped that perhaps it was just a phase she was going through and would pass. So many times they had to say that to themselves over the years!

The first time she strongly expressed herself was when she was just three years old. It was just before bedtime and Nina stood naked before the bathroom mirror staring at her penis. *"Mama, I don't want that!"* she cried. Her mother Beate sat on the edge of the bathtub and lifted Nina onto her lap explaining to her in a motherly way that because she was a boy it was normal to have a penis. Her Mama didn't have one because she was a girl, and Nina had to understand this difference between boys and girls. Nina shook her head cried and became more furious with every word her mother uttered. *"I would like it cut off"* she screamed at the top of her voice. Even today her mother shivers when she remembers that fateful evening. Beate hugged her child until she had calmed down and finally put her to bed promising that everything would be alright. Of course it was not.

At Kindergarten she was teased by the boys because she brought along her Barbies to play with the other girls. There were innumerable such scenes, almost every day. If they went shopping Nina would always run to look at the girls' dresses and at home she secretly used her mother's nail polish. No one understood her. How could she feel she was a girl and behave like one, when she undoubtedly had the body of a boy? Even the paediatricians were puzzled and didn't know what to do. One told Beate to let her play as she wished, whilst another said that she should be taught to be a normal boy. Others that it was probably just a phase she was going through and she would grow out of it.

Nina persisted in declaring herself a girl though, and gradually her mother began to doubt the doctors' advice that she would change. However Nina's father did not! He wanted Nina to be a boy and hung on to the doctors' advice stubbornly. One Sunday over breakfast he offered to take Nina to the Zoo but when she presented herself a few minutes later in a skirt and blouse, her refused to take her out.

However Beate supported Nina and allowed her to be more girlish and gradually this became a point of conflict between the parents. They separated when Nina was five years old and Beate was granted custody of the children. Nina was now able to wear what she liked to Kindergarten, though this made Beate nervous. *"What will people say?"* She heard other people gossip about Nina *"Poor child, perhaps it was the separation, or the mother wanted her to be a girl?"* One grandmother insisted on buying Nina only boys' presents, the other never mentioned Nina's behaviour. Shortly before Nina was due to enter the first year of elementary school, her class teacher took Beate on one side and told her that they would not tolerate Nina's feminine behaviour in school and that she would have to attend school as a boy. Only at home was she allowed to be a girl.

*"That was my biggest mistake"* says Beate today. *"I should have fought more strongly for her then"*. For Nina it was a complete horror, first boy, then girl and now both! In the first school year she had to wear jeans instead of a skirt, and short hair (pot cut) instead of long hair. She played with the girls but had to do sports with the boys. Other children called her names – 'stupid', 'queer', 'sissy', etc, teasing her constantly. Nina's brain could hardly take it and in the evenings she had migraines. It became so bad that she would not get out of bed in the morning, and buried herself under her bedclothes, refusing to have a light on or play music. Nina withdrew totally. No more roller-blading or cycling, she even gave up dancing which she loved! Her depression became so deep that she would cry for hours sometimes sobbing loudly, other times just softly whimpering. Finally Nina told her mother *"I would rather be dead, Mama"*

It was almost a year later, a Wednesday evening in May that she opened a small crack in her bedroom door and peeped out. Waiting until her mother and little sister were sitting at the table she came out and declared *"I am not going to be a boy anymore, I am now a girl!"* Beate stared at her child, standing there so determined, the truth screaming out from her. *"OK"* says Beate softly *"We will do that"*. *"I will only go out as girl"* says Nina. Her mother just nodded. Nina told everyone (grandmas, neighbours and teachers) that her name was now 'Nina' (she had simply asked a taxi driver his favourite girl's name and chosen it for herself!). She was so firm and rock solid in her desire to be a girl that everyone was speechless and marvelled at her determination and strength.

Yet the class teachers still refused to accept Nina's wishes and continued to refer to her as 'David'. Beate telephoned the school and tried to explain but they would not listen. Therefore today Nina stands in the living room holding her breath in excitement, gripping the telephone with both hands and delivering her ultimatum to the head teacher. Eventually the head teacher gives in and agrees to Nina attending school as a girl and being listed in Class 4b as 'Nina' and not 'David'. The first weeks at school as 'Nina' were very difficult. If she went into the girls' loo, the girls would scream *"Yuk, a boy is going into the girls' loo"*. If she went into the boys' loo, all the boys would scream *"Yuk, a girl is going into the boys' loo"*.

Beate knew that she must seek help and support for Nina. She searched on the internet and found some explanations about being transgendered and being born in the wrong body, hormone treatment, sex change operations, and the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder. The local paediatricians seemed to know nothing of this subject, and even in the health insurance company Beate worked for, no one seemed to understand the problem and just shrugged their shoulders, and looked blank.

For the first time in her life Beate felt so lost and alone, the normally confident and self assured 43year old, for once did not know what to do. In the end she got in touch with one of the few experts in this field in Germany, the child psychologist Bernd Meyernburg. For 20 years he has tried to understand and help transsexuals, especially those who are still children or young people. It was a hot June day when Nina had her first appointment with Dr Meyernburg. The entire family have come with her – mother, father, and sister. The father tells Dr Meyernburg again and again that it must be just a phase and will pass. Then Nina herself tells Dr Meyernburg about her love of girls' clothes, her Barbies, her favourite colour pink, and what has happened to her at school. At the end of the day after many questionnaires, and hour long conversations with individuals, and with the family together, Dr Meyernburg makes his diagnosis – Nina is a classic transsexual, particularly as Nina's father has opposed this so strongly, yet Nina has never doubted once that she should be a girl. He recommends that Nina should be allowed to live her life as she wishes (as a girl).

Outside, Nina races around excitedly, playing 'catch' with her younger sister. Her father, still struggling to come to terms with what he has just been told, follows slowly and thoughtfully. As the clinic door closes behind him, he is already puffing at his first cigarette. Beate and her ex husband walk a few metres to the main street in silence. Hundreds of questions are in their heads – *"How do we progress with this?" "What should we do?"*

Beate believes that Nina's transgender feelings are innate. Her neighbours reproached her saying she must have a hatred of men and therefore decided to raise her son as a girl. Even the few experts in this field in Germany have differing opinions. Some like Beate believe that transgender feelings are innate, while other believe that it can be instilled, or is perhaps a combination of both. Nina's youth also makes the situation more complex. Some experts believe that before puberty a child cannot know whether it is the correct path to chose. Nina could still change. On the other hand some (including Dr Meyernburg) believe that children know that they are in the wrong body from an early age.

*"Nina's father still struggles to accept the diagnosis",* says Beate, *"Yet he loves his children. Recently he actually bought Nina a bikini – she will never forget that!"* So he is slowly coming to terms with the situation. Meanwhile Nina improves – the headaches and aggression are now rare, all the problems from the last school year are now slowly improving.

At the door of their playroom Nina and her sister have posted a warning 'Girls are welcome, boys are not'. Both giggle girlishly. *"Nina is much happier now"* says her mother. *"Now she is allowed to be a girl all the time and to do sport with the other girls"*. Beate is determined to stand by her daughter and do all she can to help her.

Nina would love to forget her past as David, yet twice a month she must discuss it with the psychologists who are treating her and continuing to test out Dr Meyernburg's diagnosis. If they confirm that Nina is indeed transgendered, Beate can apply to the courts for an official name change. Then her ID card can be changed to show her name as 'Nina'. In a year or so she can then begin hormone 'blockers' to delay puberty and later female hormones. She would then be one of the youngest children in Germany to be treated for this condition. For transgender behaviour at this young age has only been identified and studied in the last few years. Dr Meyernburg has examined approximately 100 cases in the last 20 years of children and young people, but in the last year alone there have been thirty such cases.

Nina looks forward to being able to take female hormones. *"My only worry is having to have regular blood tests"* she says. Yet she is much more anxious about what would happen if she did not take them – she would soon start to grow facial hair, her voice would break permanently and male sexual urges would start. Many transgendered young people become so distraught during puberty that they will try and commit suicide. For two years Nina can live as a girl and make sure that she wants this for always. If she should decide to go back to being a boy, she can stop the blockers and begin masculine puberty. If however she still wants to be a girl, she can then start to take female hormones and start female puberty – her breasts will grow and her figure round and soften.

For many of the girls in Nina's class their breasts are already beginning to develop. *"Of course Nina naturally wants to keep up"*, says Beate. She is trying as hard as she can to get Nina on to female hormones as soon as possible. Once Nina is grown up, she can have surgery to remove the hated penis and other male parts and complete her femininity. The doctors say that no one will be able to recognise that she was once a boy. Of course she will not be able to bear children herself. *"Maybe I will adopt a baby one day"* says Nina. Does she want a husband one day? *"No, or perhaps yes!"* she says shrugging her shoulders. Nina now seems so carefree, yet only if she doesn't think back to the past – the depression, crying fits, teasing and bullying in the schoolyard – being 'David' that odd feminine boy.

Nina was finally able to throw her last pair of boys' pants into the old dress collection box and took down the last pictures of her as a boy from the living room wall. So quickly it all went, yet you cannot just throw your past life into a box and forget it. Nina's mother knows that she will still have to fight again and again and explain her situation to more physicians, new friends, and new teachers, as she soon moves up to secondary school.

No one who sees her now will think of her as a boy, at least on first view. Her blond hair is almost shoulder length. Carefully she flicks up her eyelashes with her index finger. On her pink T shirt the slogan 'GIRL' stand out boldly.

If the family speak of past vacation trips or birthday parties and the name 'David' slips from her mother's mouth, Nina looks at her mother seriously and asks "Why do you say that Mama?" Beate hesitates briefly and smiling says "Because I sometime speak in the past!"



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