

Translation from **Dutch** to **English** of Dutch magazine Viva's article published on 2012/06/20, on pages 36-40. Original title: "*Mijn penis blijft*".

Translator: Maya Posch

"My Penis Stays"

INTERVIEW Adeline Mans, **PHOTOS** Wout Jan Balhuizen

Maya Posch (28) is the first hermaphrodite in the Netherlands who can officially call herself a woman without sex-reassignment surgery. It took many years of examinations, legal cases and even a suicide attempt.

"Until recently I went through life as a boy. Yet actually I have two sexes: I'm half boy, half girl. A hermaphrodite in other words, someone with internal female reproductive organs, but also a penis and testicles.

"My entire life I have felt different from others. More woman than man, despite the penis. I was regarded as a boy, but slept during school trips on the girls' room. Nobody thought that was odd. Talking and playing girl games until late at night, I much preferred it. I was more advanced intellectually than those of my age due to being gifted. Yet in other areas I was behind. As a teenager during puberty my voice was higher than those of other boys. I started talking lower, so that I always had a sore throat. Boy's clothes didn't fit well, because I had different sizes than the average boy.

"Even back then I already knew that something wasn't right about my body. Someone once said to me that I was wrong when I entered the men's public toilet. I didn't find that insulting, but rather interesting. I didn't see myself as a girl, but that others did so I found to be rather cool."

Contact Cut Off

"Sex didn't interest me at that point. I sometimes thought that I was asexual and didn't want to have anything to do with it. Yet when I was twenty-one I became aware of my femininity. It was in a DIY market. I realized there, in that masculine location, tried to appear feminine. I swayed with my hips and walked differently. More feminine. When I came back that evening I looked at myself in the mirror for the first time in a different way. As though the image shifted and I finally saw who I am. What I am. All those years I focused on the boy in the mirror, but I was a girl. Just with a penis.

"My mother responded positively when I told her. She was glad that I finally had realized what had made me so unhappy. That I could finally let go of the confusion about what I actually was. My mother and I talked a lot about how I felt and she supported me in everything. Acquaintances understood it as well. Yet I didn't have to count on understanding from my father. A hormone treatment he considered to be nonsense, because he could not understand that I felt more woman than man. Due to that position and because my parents aren't together any more, I have ultimately lost all contact with him.

"On the internet I read everything I could find about intersex and hermaphroditism. I wanted to know what was exactly going on with me and what I could do with it. Hermaphroditism turned out to be a form of intersex, whereby someone has both male and female reproductive tissue. I always thought that I was the only one, but I read stories from others who had the same and this helped me.

“It felt like confirmation; I was no boy who wanted to be a girl, but was biologically speaking a bit of both. Even though I had no medical evidence of this. That's why I went to the VU Medical Center, the specialist when it comes to transgender. They were busy with research on intersex, but I didn't get any understanding. Worse, I got sent into the transgender protocol for a sex change, because the psychologist thought that I wanted to become a woman. Yet I just wanted to know whether I was truly a hermaphrodite. Before I could participate in an examination for hormone treatment I was first put on a waiting list of four months.

“Because I hadn't received any messages after six months I called the VUMC myself. It turned out that they had forgotten about me. After that I ended up at the urologist. I hoped that he could see whether I also have a vagina. **I had felt between my legs at times where it felt like I could penetrate myself a bit.** During his examination I was very tense. Everything was locked up down there. The urologist didn't see anything and asked at a certain point whether I was sure I didn't feel the other hole. This made me question myself. Was I crazy? Maybe I was a transgender after all and would have to behave like one.

Blur Covering My Eyes

“Due to those doubts I didn't have a lot of self-esteem. I was early twenties and considered myself a loser. I didn't have many friends and the friend I did trust ended up horribly abusing me. I thought that I was ugly. So when he visited one time and wanted sex with me I had mixed thoughts. Did it mean that he did find me attractive? I didn't want to give into it, but didn't dare to say no. Only afterwards did I see how wrong it was; he knew how uncertain I was and abused that.

“From that point onwards things went wrong. I frequented sexdating sites and spent hours in front of the webcam. As though I wanted to try and compensate for my lack of healthy sexual experiences. Yet even there people had little interest in me.

“Meanwhile I kept looking for solutions. I knew I wanted hormone treatment, because I knew for sure that a female hormone balance would fit better with my body. At my second appointment to the VUMC I immediately got approval, but the appointment which followed after it made it very clear that I would have to wait another six months before I'd get approval. At that point, in the doctor's room, it seemed a blur covered my eyes.

“I became more frustrated every day by the uncertainty and couldn't take it any more. I threw my belongings down onto the floor and ran out of the room to my mother who was waiting in the corridor. When the doctor then called my mother into the room and proposed to her that I would be admitted to the psychiatric ward I cancelled all my appointments at the VUMC. If they didn't want to help me I would do it myself.

“I ordered the hormone medication via internet and determined the right dose myself with a bit of help from my family doctor. After a few weeks of trial I found out that I only required a quarter of the amount of testosterone blocker, where a transgender needs the full dose. This once again confirmed my sense of being a woman. I was now twenty-three and for the first time I experienced some peace while my testosterone level decreased. Because testosterone had a major impact on my libido and made me aggressive. The medication also ensured that I got less hair – although I already had very little facial hair. Only my facial hair remained, but those hairs I remove with electric epilation. That I got breasts was very pleasant. During puberty I already had a bit of breast growth, but now they were there for real.

“It was exciting to buy women's clothes for the first time. I had just begun with the hormone treatment, but thought to myself 'I'll just do it'. And it all fit. Finally I could wear what I wanted, such a dress. I traded my boxer shorts for lingerie, because I didn't have that much to put away. When I first went to the swimming pool as a girl I was quite nervous. Yet nothing happened. Nobody looked strangely at me or said anything about it. I was just a woman who looked pretty

attractive. I would never have thought that before.

Two Marriage Proposals

“At a private clinic in Germany I made an appointment for an MRI scan to find out whether I have male or female reproductive organs. Half an hour later I knew the answer. The radiologist said she had never seen anything like it before, because I did indeed turn out to have female reproductive organs. I was happy, this was the evidence that I wasn't crazy. Yet at the VUMC – I went back in the hope that they'd help me now – they thought differently about it. My doctor wasn't interested and said that he could see nothing on the scan. When I asked what I was then, he said: 'I don't know.'

“I felt so unhappy. In my own country I couldn't even get help, let alone recognition. All uncertainty about who I am, my frustrations about the hospital... I couldn't take it any more. I was through with it. I even attempted suicide, which – fortunately – failed.

“Would the radiologist have lied? Was I a man who wanted to become a woman? I refused to believe that. And so I went back to Germany for a second opinion. Yet again it turned out that I had female reproductive organs. Yet the VUMC kept being difficult, they said that I was merely a boy who looked feminine. According to the doctor I should stop with this pointless quest. Instead I underwent exploratory surgery in Germany. They saw that I have a vagina and that my testicles do not function as for other men. They're basically little more than undivided tissue, which also explains why I do not ejaculate.

“It feels horrible that the VUMC has never taken me seriously. Thanks to them I have remained in uncertainty for so long. Last year I went to the judge to get recognition after all. A female identity fits better for me. And I am also a woman, not hundred percent men. I wanted to make that official. **All those visits to the hospital and court I didn't do for myself. I want that no other hermaphrodite or other person with intersex ever has to go through this.**

“Due to the recent court ruling I can now go through life as Maya instead of Thijs. I have chosen that name because I think it's beautiful and international. Yet I'm not there yet. I can only now begin with catching up on my emotional and financial backlog. I have never had relationships, yet gladly wanted them. Preferably with a woman with whom I would feel safe. Men I also find attractive, yet there are so few sensitive, understanding ones. Thereby comes also that my most pleasant sexual experience was with a woman.

“After my exploratory surgery I have dated once and it felt fantastic. Simply with my head on someone else's shoulder. Since a few weeks I'm now together with a woman. It's early, but we really like each other. Everything takes time. Some things I still don't dare, such as going to the sauna. After my story in the newspaper I suddenly got two marriage proposals, very amusing. For now I want a beautiful future and recognition. The VUMC I'm holding responsible. I want to show that the protocol is incorrect, that intersex *does* exist. And everybody should know it. My penis stays; I was born with it and it is part of me. Sometimes it's very practical, because I can easily quickly go to the toilet. But it also makes me a hermaphrodite. I'm looking for a doctor who can make my vagina visible, because I am after all man *and* woman.

Sidebars:

What is what?

Intersex With intersex or hermaphroditism the body displays both male and female characteristics. For example: someone who looks like a woman but instead of ovaries and a womb has male sex chromosomes. There are many different types of intersex. In the most cases the cause is a genetic

glitch, but a hormonal disorder, or multiple chromosomes in a single fertilized egg can also lead to hermaphroditism. In some cases it's immediately visible at birth, other times it's only noticed during puberty.

Transgender Everyone who sees himself as someone of the opposite sex, but isn't that sex, falls into the category 'transgender'. For example: a man who goes through life as a woman. This doesn't have to involve sex reassignment; sometimes hormone therapy is sufficient. A transgender is not the same as a transvestite, because that is someone who sometimes pretends to be someone of the opposite sex. A transsexual is someone who undergoes sex reassignment surgery.

Want to know more about intersexuality and Maya? Go to MayaPosch.com.

At the Court

After a legal battle of seven years the court determined in April that Maya can call herself a woman, even though she has not had sex reassignment surgery. Thereby did her intersexuality also get recognized. Her case has been handed to the Medical Disciplinary Board which will decide in a few months whether she or the Dutch hospitals have handled incorrectly. What Maya ultimately wants is recognition from the hospitals and financial compensation for the emotional and financial damage.