The full transition from man to woman that saved Joy Ladins’s life

Mike Cohen

What is it like for someone to grow up transgender, enjoy a successful career, get married and become the father of three children and then transition and undergo a sex change operation? This is the story of Joy Ladins, formerly Jay, the first openly transgender employee of an Orthodox Jewish institution (Stern College of Yeshiva University in New York).

Ladins will be in Montreal on Thursday, April 24 to share her remarkable story at the Jewish Public Library, with a public session preceded by an intimate dinner conversation. I reached her in New York last week. “I was going to kill myself if I had to continue living as a man, so the only way to continue living was as my true self,” she shared. “What made that choice hard was the suffering my transition brought to my family. I knew that my marriage, like most marriages, wouldn’t survive my gender transition, and that divorce would shatter my children’s home.”

Ladins’s memoir, Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey Between Genders, was a finalist for a 2012 National Jewish Book Award and winner of other plaudits. How does she relate to her three children, now 19, 14, and 10? “They do still call me ‘Daddy’ and I saw all of them two to three times a week until a year and a half ago, when my older daughter stopped talking to me,” she notes. “I’ll find out why when she starts talking to me again. I still see my son, who goes to a local college, and my younger daughter, regularly.”

Has she been the victim of any abuse since the transition? “When I was a child, I was teased and bullied and occasionally beaten up for not conforming to what my peers thought boys should be or do,” Ladins responded. “Not that I was openly transgenders - I was terrified of revealing that I wasn’t really the boy everyone saw me as. Since I began living as myself, I have often been the target of online criticism and ridicule, but only once have I been harassed or bullied in person - on a two-hour bus trip, I was mocked by a group of college students. It was a traumatic experience, but nothing compared to the abuse and sometimes physical assaults to which many transgender people, particularly transgender women of color, are subjected every day.”

For more information about her talk log on to www.jewishpubliclibrary.org. You can read more in the April 11 Suburban Magazine.

Election Media Highlights: With the Quebec election now history, what will miss most is the fabulous media coverage. There is a long list of radio and TV show hosts, as well as pundits, who deserve our thanks. They include our own activist editor Beryl Wajsman; Tommy Schnurmancher, Jean Lapiere, Aaron Rand, Dan Delmar, Andrew Carter, James Mennie, Barry Morgan and Angelica Montgomery of CIAD; Jamie Orchard and her Focus Montreal candidate debates on Global TV; Max Harrold, Rob Lurie and Barry Wilson of CTV; Bernard St. Laurent, Mike Pinnerly, Thomas Daigle and Sue Smith at CBC; and Laura Casella and Elisa Makos on City’s Breakfast Television.

COHEN CHATTER: The fifth annual Community Musical fundraiser, Come Together! A Tribute to the Beatles, takes place this Sunday at the Segal Centre for the Arts. This occasion gives volunteer performers the chance to have their moment to shine on the Segal stage. Some notable participants include lawyer and city councillor Mitchell Brownstein and Just For Laughs boss Andy Nulman. Jason Franco is the director and choreographer. Info: www.segalcentre.org. Have you got something to share? Email mcohen@thesuburban.com or call 514-484-9203, ext. 307. Follow me on Twitter @mikecohencsl and on my blog at http://blog.thesuburban.com