

**IN THIS ISSUE**  
**RED THREAD** magazine  
**JN**  
DETROIT JEWISH NEWS

JULY 31 - AUG. 6, 2014 / 4 - 10 AV 5774

A JEWISH RENAISSANCE MEDIA PUBLICATION

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» **Israel Rally** Metro Detroiters stand with Israel at local solidarity event. **See page 14.**

» **Gaza War** John Kerry — friend or betrayer of Israel? **See page 36.**

» **Primary Season** Meet candidates for Congress in the 11th District and for state office, too. **Primary Guide begins on 41.**



An Israeli flag lends a show of support as people wait to pass through security.

Brett Mountain

**metro** » cover story

**Anti-Semitism Rises In Europe**

Amanda Borschel-Dan  
Times of Israel

**T**he room was packed to capacity at the Knesset on Monday for an emergency meeting on the “rising wave of violent anti-Semitic and anti-Israel demonstrations sweeping Europe,” with MKs (members of Knesset) and diaspora Jewish leaders offering testimony and issuing condemnations.

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In the Paris suburb of Sarcelles, pro-Palestinian rioters broke shop windows and set fires on July 20.

Cnaan Liphshiz/JTA

*Call Him*  
**Hunter**  
Transgender teen, family break barriers on the path to his authentic life.  
Ronelle Grier | Contributing Writer

Enchanted Photography by Maria Michele Must

**H**unter Jordan Keith, 15, has always known he was different. For the first 14 years of his life, he lived inside the female body he was born with, going by his given name, Olivia Lauren Keith. Looking back, he says he never felt comfortable as a female; often he felt trapped and betrayed by his own body.

“In fifth grade, I remember watching a TV show on

female-to-male transition, and I thought, ‘Wait, that’s me,’” Hunter said. “I’d never been ‘one of the girls;’ I usually hung out with the boys.”

At 14, Hunter began doing extensive Internet research about gender and sexuality. He learned what it meant to be transgender and familiarized himself with various treatment options, such as testosterone and various surgical procedures. He identified with a YouTube video series created by a teen in the process of transitioning from a female to a male.

“I kept seeing myself in every single bit,” Hunter said. “This is me, this is me ... it was like a checklist. Finally, there was no doubt in my mind.”

When Hunter told his parents, Roz and Richard Keith of Farmington Hills, he was transgender, they were not shocked, but both admit it took some time to

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# Call Him Hunter

Transgender teen, family break barriers on the path to his authentic life.

Ronelle Grier | Contributing Writer

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absorb the situation and catch up on the information Hunter had been gathering.

"It was a lot to process," Roz said. "We weren't familiar with things like hormone therapy, but I was glad he was confiding in me, telling me what was going on. I viewed it as another hurdle we'd have to deal with."

Richard Keith said Hunter had always related to him as a typical tomboy, enjoying activities such as fishing, skateboarding and shooting.

"That felt natural," he said. "I never expected he should be 'girly.'"

But Hunter's news took the family into new and unfamiliar territory beyond their previous experience.

"At first it was something I had to wrestle with, wondering how it would affect Hunter's future," Richard said.

Richard attended a two-day conference sponsored by Affirmations, where he learned about many of the issues relating to transgender individuals, including appropriate terminology and therapeutic aspects. He described the experience as a "pretty intense two days."

"I had to wrap my head around it, psychologically and intellectually," said Richard, "but I felt Hunter needed all the support he could get. And we're not just trying; we're doing that."

The Keiths have since become Hunter's greatest champions. Roz has forged a support system made up of other parents in similar situations, health care professionals and advocacy groups. Her blog, "Call Him Hunter" ([callhimhunter.wordpress.com](http://callhimhunter.wordpress.com)), has drawn comments from parents and professionals all over the country.

"In the past several months, I've discovered there is so much out there," she said, "and the more you talk, the more you hear other people's stories."

Once a hush-hush topic, the issues faced by transgender people have received national attention of late, including a cover story in a recent issue of *Time* magazine featuring Laverne Cox, star of the TV series *Orange Is the New Black*. Cox, the first openly transgender actor to receive an Emmy nomination, has become a staunch advocate for transgender people everywhere.

President Barack Obama brought the issue to the forefront last month when he announced upcoming executive orders specifically banning both discrimination against transgender federal employees and anti-LGBT discrimination by federal con-



The Keith family: Roz, Danielle, Hunter and Richard

tractors.

Among his family, Hunter's disclosure was more difficult for his older sister, Danielle, 18, who will be starting college this fall.

"At first, I didn't know how to comprehend it ... this was my baby sister; it was always Danielle and Olivia," she said. "It was hard letting go of one idea of a person, but when I started to talk about it, it became easier."

Danielle has tried to educate herself about transgender issues so she can be more supportive and understanding, and says she and Hunter have become closer since the situation was brought into the open.

"Our relationship is the same on the inside," she said. "That didn't change."

When it came time to choose a new name, the family wanted a male name consistent with Olivia's Hebrew name, Helah, in memory of Roz's uncle, Harold. Hunter was the popular choice. His middle name, Jordan, is in memory of the child the Keiths lost many years ago before Danielle was born.

The first time Hunter shared his transgender status with friends was last summer at Tamarack's Camp Kennedy.

"Everyone there was so accepting, it gave me the courage to come out on Facebook,"

he said. "Before that I'd been kind of avoiding it."

This summer, Hunter is participating in the Tamarack Agree Outpost Camp, a wilderness adventure program based in Ontario. He is bunking with female friends who know and accept his situation. According to the Keiths, camp administrators have made every effort to ensure a positive camp experience, and a recent enthusiastic phone call from Hunter confirmed that goal has been met with rousing success.

"Hunter feels like camp has changed his life," Roz said.

## Transgender Facts

According to the American Psychological Association, transgender is an umbrella term for individuals whose identity does not match their biological designation. In other words, a person who was born female but identifies as a male, like Hunter, is considered transgender.

While the transgender category is included in the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) community, the term refers to gender identity only. This is separate from sexual orientation, which refers to sexual attraction. A transgender person can be gay, straight, bisexual or pansexual (those whose

attraction is based on the person rather than his/her sex).

Experts have been unable to pinpoint a specific reason why some people are transgender, but the general consensus is that a variety of biological, hormonal and other factors are involved.

While it is hard to find exact statistics, a 2011 study conducted by Gary J. Gates of the UCLA School of Law concluded there are approximately 700,000 transgender people in the United States, about 0.3 percent of the population. These numbers may be even higher now that increased public awareness and advocacy efforts have made it more acceptable for transgender individuals to disclose what was previously kept hidden.

The Keiths were shocked when they learned about the high suicide rate among transgender individuals. A 2011 survey by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality showed 41 percent of the more than 6,400 respondents said they had attempted suicide. This is more than 25 times the average suicide rate of 1.6 percent for members of the general population in the United States.

For those who had lost a job due to bias,

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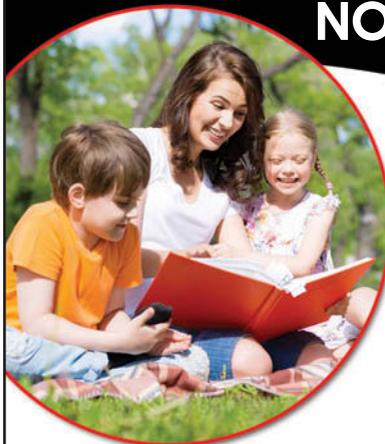
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## metro

### Hunter from page 8

were harassed or bullied in school, had low household income or were the victims of physical assault, the suicide rates were even higher.

Within that same study, 90 percent of the respondents said they had experienced harassment, discrimination and mistreatment in their places of employment, and the instances of bullying from peers also was much higher.

### Bodily Changes

Transitioning from one gender to another involves a unique set of medical and health care issues. Treatment options vary according to many factors; there is no one-size-fits-all approach to get from here to there.

Hunter is currently taking hormone blockers to stop his menstrual cycles and wears a chest binder to achieve a more masculine appearance. For younger transgender children, there are puberty blockers that prevent the normal developmental changes from occurring.

"It's a way to buy time," Roz said. "Once you go through puberty, you can't go back."

By the time Hunter confided in his parents, he knew he wanted to begin testosterone hormone therapy, which causes changes that include a deeper voice, growth of facial and body hair, and muscular changes typically associated with a male physique.

He is seeing a psychotherapist, which is required for transgender individuals who are considering hormone therapy.

"They need to know you're not planning on going back," Hunter said.

Like many transgender individuals, Hunter suffered from body dysphoria; there was a huge disparity between the self-image in his mind and the reflection in the mirror.

"You look in the mirror and you don't see you," he said. "That's not right. That's not supposed to be there. It's crippling."

Changing his appearance, which included a haircut and a new wardrobe, and becoming open about his gender identification has increased his confidence and improved his self-image.

"I used to hate having my picture taken; now I'm jumping into pictures and photobombing all over the place," he said.

According to psychotherapist Alicia Mindlin, body image issues are common for many adolescents; for transgender teens, the problem is magnified from years of feeling different and knowing



Alicia Mindlin

their bodies do not reflect the way they feel inside. She helps clients validate their emotions and decide on the best course of action, which is often transitioning from one gender to another.



Roz Keith and her son, Hunter

"Being transgender is not a pathological condition," Mindlin said. "It's like ... oops, nature got it wrong, so how do we correct it so things are right."

In addition to testosterone therapy, Hunter wants to have surgery to remove breast tissue, but he is undecided about genital surgery, which is generally more successful for male-to-female transitions. For now, he is more concerned with feeling comfortable with himself and living authentically.

"Gender is in your mind, not your pants," he said.

Using public restrooms has presented some challenges. Hunter has been told he was in the wrong line while waiting to enter the ladies room in a public venue. Now he uses a stall in the men's room most of the time, except when he is with people who knew him before his transition, such as classmates. Then he uses the ladies room to avoid making any of his peers uncomfortable.

While there are a variety of treatment options available for transgender people, obtaining health care comes with its own challenges. Certain drugs and procedures are not covered by insurance plans, and finding specialists who are trained in this field can be difficult.

"It's important to find a pediatric endocrinologist who understands and is willing to treat transgender kids," said Roz Keith, who put together her own team of local and out-of-state health care professionals.

She also stressed the importance of finding a therapist who is knowledgeable about transgender issues.

"There's a big missing link when it comes to finding therapists and organizations that help younger people in the early stages [of transitioning]," said Richard Keith.

Last November, the Jewish Fund, established with proceeds from the 1997 sale of Sinai Hospital, approved \$52,440 for the first year of a three-year \$158,630 grant to Affirmations, a Ferndale-based organization for LGBT individuals and advocates. The grant will be used to improve access to quality healthcare for LGBT people through training programs for medical personnel.

"There is a high level of disparity and discrimination; a lot of treat-

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MDA is not government-funded, so please give today and join us at the gala on September 11th. For sponsorships, tribute journal ads, and gala reservations, visit [www.afmda.org/mames-gala](http://www.afmda.org/mames-gala) or call 877.405.3913.

## Celebration of Life Gala

Thursday, September 11, 2014 · 5:30 p.m.  
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ments are not covered," said Kathleen LaTosch, project director for the Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Health Equity Council of Southeast Michigan, the group formed to carry out the work defined by the grant. "Many doctors and nurses don't understand the transgender experience."

Transgender people also face social discrimination when seeking medical care. The 2011 survey cited earlier revealed 19 percent of the respondents were actually denied treatment because of their gender identification, while another 28 percent experienced verbal harassment from medical staff members.

LaTosch and her committee will work with local health care providers and administrators, as well as members of the LGBT community, to identify the problems and develop a strategic plan to address the issues and correct the disparities.

### Legal Issues

We live in a society where our identities are verified by an assortment of documents: driver's license, birth certificate, Social Security card, passport. For transgender individuals, these credentials may not accurately reflect their current identities, and changing official records can be time-consuming and complicated. The Keiths have begun the process of legally changing Hunter's name, which they hope to complete before the coming school year.

"It was painful for Hunter to see his name listed as Olivia on the school roster," said Roz Keith.

Changing the name on his birth certificate requires a different procedure, and altering the gender designation on documents such as birth certificates, passports or insurance policies involves yet another process.

### Support And Acceptance

While many transgender teens have been bullied and ostracized, Hunter has received overwhelming support from his family and the community at large. With the help of Temple Israel in West Bloomfield, where the Keiths are members, Hunter and another teen attended a Shabbaton for transgender teens in Connecticut. The event was sponsored by the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ).



Rabbi Joshua Bennett

Rabbi Joshua Bennett of Temple Israel feels it is important to create a loving and accepting environment for all of its members, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

"It's a matter of social justice, every person in the community is responsible for everyone else," Bennett said. "We are not here to judge, but simply to take care of each other."

His friends from camp and classmates at school have accepted that Olivia is now Hunter. They realize his clothes and haircut may be different, but the person inside is still the same.

Hunter's most ardent supporters are his family members. Roz has become a powerful advocate for transgender people and for the concept of unconditional parental love. She cannot understand parents who reject their children because they are gay, transgender or otherwise different from the societal norm.

"If you love your children, you have to love them as they are and help them become the best version of themselves," she said. "Be their advocate. Make it clear your love is unconditional." □

## Transgender And LGBT Resources

- Affirmations, (248) 398-7105, helpline: (248) 398-GAYS (4297), transgender helpline 6:30-9 p.m. Thursdays, [www.goaffirmations.org](http://www.goaffirmations.org).
- Common Ground Sanctuary, 24-hour crisis/resource hotline: (800) 231-1127, or [www.commongroundsanctuary.org](http://www.commongroundsanctuary.org).
- Jewish Gay Network of Michigan at the JCCs in West Bloomfield and Oak Park; email: [info@jgnmi.org](mailto:info@jgnmi.org); (248) 432-5661.
- Keshet, grassroots group dedicated to creating an inclusive community for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Jews, [www.keshetonline.org](http://www.keshetonline.org).
- Jewish Mosaic, the National Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity, [www.jewishmosaic.org](http://www.jewishmosaic.org).
- JQYouth, social/support group made up of observant/formerly observant LGBT Jews ages 17-30 with an anonymous online discussion group, [www.jqyouth.org/index.html](http://www.jqyouth.org/index.html).
- Michigan Equality, political/educational advocacy to combat discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, [www.michiganequality.org](http://www.michiganequality.org).
- *The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals* (2008) by Stephanie A. Brill and Rachel Pepper.