

# Transitioning with Weed

by Sharon Letts  
Photos by Sharon Letts &  
Lew Robertson

As Utah transplant and 23 year-old Humboldt State University graduate, Marval A. Rechsteiner transitions from a biological female to a male, with the use of cannabis literally evolving with him.

“I initially thought I wanted to be completely sober when I went under the knife,” he said from his home in Humboldt County. “But the more I learn about its benefits for pain, inflammation, infection and overall healing, the more I’m realizing I’m going to need it before and after surgery.”

Born a blood Jew, raised as a Catholic in predominately Mormon Salt Lake City, Rechsteiner said he’s happy to be in Humboldt County where the plant and education on medicine is plentiful.

With a BFA in Sculptural Ceramics under his belt, he’s also looking forward to growing as an activist, using “Art as Activism for Trans,” and for POC (People of Color).

“I’m about to head to a Trans conference known as ‘Gender Odyssey’ in Seattle, Washington, helping its guest artist set up a show dealing with trans/racial intersections of identity,” he shared. “And I get to meet some famous names in the transgender community!”

Though gays, lesbians, and bisexually identified people are somewhat more accepted now, transgender, or “gender-benders,” such as Rechsteiner, have been traditionally unable to fit in, due largely to being perceived as confused for dressing or acting as the opposite sex in order to feel alright in their own skin.

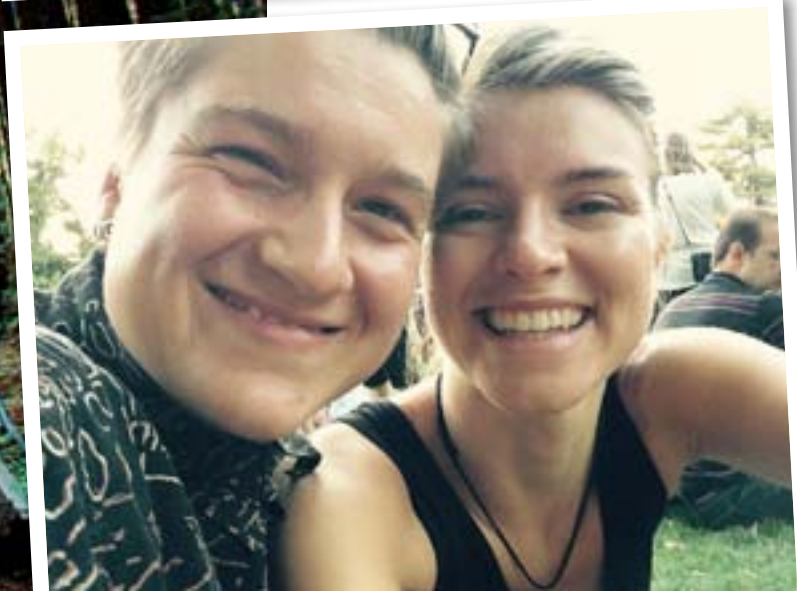
“Growing up in Salt Lake City in the 90s, by my very biology as a gender-bending person, I was an outsider, freak, and rebel from a young age,” he said. “I had crushes on the young girls my age and felt that the boys were often competitive and mean to each other. The strict gender norms of either male or female confused me greatly and caused me stress from a very early age. I began to disassociate from my body around the onset of adolescence, and high school became a time of secrets; secrets around the core of my identity and gender. Basically, as a teenager, I felt my body had betrayed me.”



Stress, anxiety, panic attacks, agoraphobia, and eating disorders – all this and more are symptoms most LGBT youth deal with on a daily basis. Bullying is top of the list, with Rechsteiner quoting Kate Bornstein, regarding then President Bush, Jr. and the forced to choose mantra of “are you with us or against us?” rhetoric.

“From my own experience, and those of close friends who identify as queer, you grow up in a heightened state of anxiety or fear,” he said. “For LGBT and POC, we get a special brand of fear-mongering, because we aren’t even ‘normal’ looking to begin with. Therefore the ‘are you with us or against us’ question is already thrown out with the Christian baby and the bathwater. They use physical and institutional violence to get us.”

Both the FDA and the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services have given a green light to Suzanne Sisley, a researcher at the University of Arizona, to conduct research on cannabis use for “Post Traumatic Stress Disorders” (PTSDs). The 10-week ‘blind’ study, meaning some given a placebo and some given cannabis, would examine 50 veterans and is yet to be approved by the DEA. With more than 7.7 million Americans suffering from PTSD, Sisley is hopeful for approval.



“Although there is a mountain of anecdotal evidence that marijuana helps with PTSD, there has been no controlled trial to test how marijuana suppresses the symptoms, including flashbacks, insomnia and anxiety,” said Sisley via USA Today (March, 2014).

“I have trigger points in relation to my gender identity,” Rechsteiner shared. “I’ll have a panic attack because of fear and internalized self-hatred that looks very much like a PTSD episode. Other gender-nonconforming people have told me of similar attacks where it feels like the world is about to collapse in on them. Look at it this way, if your very identity is constantly made invisible or stereotyped negatively, you disassociate from integral parts of who you are – and what that means is years and years of unpacking the hatred inside yourself to find yourself again, and find love.”

Rechsteiner said queer people often use cannabis in a negative way, just like any other substance used to bypass emotional hurting. He also acknowledges how it has helped him deal with all sorts of issues surrounding his identity. “In the past when the panic attacks began I was prescribed Xanax to calm me down,” he explained. “Now, I use cannabis in specific ways. During my transition with hormone replacement therapy I was smoking, as it lifts your mood fairly quickly. But tincture is by far my best option in terms of calming my fear down. I don’t get blazed out of my mind on it, it helps me to get into my body and feel good inside my body – which for someone like me who has disassociated for such a long time – is deeply healing.”

To help with Marval A. Rechsteiner’s medical transition a “You Caring” account has been set up. For more information, visit [Youcaring.com/marval-a-rex-393250](http://Youcaring.com/marval-a-rex-393250)

Help with transitioning youth  
Center for Disease Control:  
[Cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm](http://Cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm)

The Advocate: [Advocate.com](http://Advocate.com)

Colage: [Colage.org](http://Colage.org)

Stop Bullying: [Stopbullying.gov](http://Stopbullying.gov)