

NO MATTER WHAT

Witnessing transphobia made me protective of my older brother

by Sofia Ball

Long hazel locks fell to the floor. The dulcet tones of wind chimes echoed throughout the barbershop, while nervous glances ricocheted against the textile flooring.

In the corner of my eye, I could spot my half-brother's aunts tearing up, and not in the "congratulations" or "I'm so proud of you" kind of way.

Days of dressing their niece's hair and plaiting it with precious bows were over.

As the barber swiveled the chair, letting the family take a moment to see the finished product beneath the blanket of glares, I could make out only one smile.

Relief began to unfurl in his shoulders. This was the first piece of the puzzle.

My parents and I always knew my sibling wasn't the average girly girl. Instead of skirts, it was joggers. Instead of halter tops, it was oversized tees. Now I'm not saying wearing sweatshirts and baggy jeans as a middle school girl automatically outs you as transgender, but for Dre, it was different.

I've never been one to experience body dysphoria, however, when it affects someone you've known your whole life, you start to notice things.

The fake smiles.

The shielded anger.

The closed doors.

It felt as if our bond was becoming more and more compressed with every binder.

Until it snapped.

I don't know how and I don't know when, but as time passed, our interactions became less "hey's" and "excuse me's." They turned into actual talks and distant understanding which resolved to acceptance.

It wasn't that I never accepted my brother, I always did. It's just that experiencing something like this so young, you never truly comprehend it till you've outgrown recess.

Growing up in a relaxed household, where I never had to take my shoes off at the door or worry about coasters, I was always educated on respect.

Respect for pronouns, opinions and appearances.

So I assumed, like any kid, that every other household was the same way.

Boy, was I wrong.

Seeing the news headline from PBS News Hour say "at least 32 transgender people were killed in the U.S. in 2022,"



Freshman Sofia Ball leans on her 21-year-old brother Dre Knox March 29. Knox is transgender. "I love how my brother is always there for people and willing to set time aside, even if it's inconvenient for him," Ball said.

photo by Kara Simpson

and TikTok comments reading "people like you make me sick" opened my eyes to a world I never wanted to be part of.

More than anything, I was confused.

How could my brother, who goes to bed with milk mustaches, be feared?

How could my brother, who made pillow forts for me when I was sick, be hated?

How could my brother, who walked our bikes home when my knees were skinned, be seen as disgusting?

As the youngest sibling, I was viewed as annoying, but as I got older I wanted to be a protector and shield him from all the hate.

What's hard to accept is that I can't. I know I can't.

No matter what anyone says, I don't care what the birth certificate read, he will always be my brother.