

My retreat at Safe Haven – July 2017

I've been Sophie for 14 months.

Unlike many of my friends I didn't know about me until 14 months ago. Yes, I'd casually dressed since I was fifteen but I had no real idea of who I am.

The 14 months have been a whirlwind of discovery, affirmation, and mistakes too.

I'm registered at The Laurels Gender Identity Clinic and am lucky enough to be receiving bridging hormones, I went full time in April 2017.

Despite all this positivity I started to realise I was "losing me", going round in circles and though I was full time I was still two people... it was getting terribly confusing being me and male mode when he was needed.

Friends were starting to notice I possibly wasn't as happy as I thought I was, and after a fairly self destructive evening in Plymouth involving far too much alcohol for a fifty-something year old (who believed she was 36 going on 15) I came to the realisation I may need to change direction.

Pixie had on several occasions invited me to retreat at Safe Haven, knowing (as she always seems to) that I wasn't quite right. This time I accepted gratefully.

On arrival I found Safe Haven so different to the usual Party atmosphere and was able to take in the peace and tranquillity, later to be broken by my girlish squeals as I was coaxed into the swimming pool!

Not only did Pixie have a job to do on my confused head but she also wished to take my presentation up a notch or 10. She told me she and I had an appointment with Alex of Roundabout/Lusty Locks to see if we could do something with my hair, as it was one of my weak points.

I nervously agreed and the next day was treated to some styling and colouring and some hair accessories. I was so touched, I know my new look is a winner which has boosted my self confidence and my peace of mind. I also had the therapeutic chance to help groom the gorgeous horses that live there. I've never been that close to a horse let alone been in a position to groom one. It's an amazing relaxing thing to do.

Over the next two days I had two sessions with Pixie. I had been nervous about this as I've never in my life had counselling and was concerned a friend would be looking in my head.

I realised from the start that this would not be a concern. Pixie the counsellor was the most professional person I've ever talked to. I cried, I opened up, I looked inside myself, I talked about my abusive childhood which I've almost never shared. I talked of who I believed I am and who I want to be.

At no time was I told what I should do or shouldn't, but I was given signs to read and choices I could make.

I learnt that male-mode still pulled strings and controlled my life in ways I hadn't been aware.

Talking to Pixie gave me back control of me and on my return to my home I started to repair things I'd unwittingly damaged, family relationships and other things in my life. More importantly Pixie helped me pack male-mode away. There was no murder, no unpleasantness, just a much used coat put to the back of the cupboard. I've since managed to become one person. I cannot begin to tell you how liberating that is.

Should you have the opportunity to take a Safe Haven retreat I'd say don't miss the chance.

You may not be broken or as broken as I was, but we can all do with a little maintenance, can't we?"