



THE ONLY FLOWER IN THE FIELD

Growing Up Trans In A Small Southern Rural Town

By Marcia S. McNeill



50-year-old DonnieRae Spears, is a married, African American transwoman and teacher of Fordyce, Arkansas. Fordyce is a small rural city where people know who you are by name. DonnieRae says that she is the only transgender person in Fordyce. As a matter of fact, she states she doesn't know of any other people who are a part of the LGBTQ+ community. DonnieRae desired to leave Fordyce when she was younger, to live where it was more accepted to be a transgender person. A place where no one knew who she was in order for her to feel more comfortable in her skin. The special connection with her grandmother is what tied DonnieRae to Fordyce, keeping her from leaving. She didn't want her grandmother to go into a nursing home. DonnieRae stayed to take care of her.

In her adolescence, DonnieRae met two teachers that practically raised her into who she is today. She started her transition into a woman in high school, where she found support from the two teachers who loved and accepted DonnieRae. Her mother had a very hard time accepting who DonnieRae is. Their relationship was strained from childhood. She says that she didn't have a father. DonnieRae recalls her mother saying, "can't you be who you are without wearing makeup, eyeliner, and carrying a purse"? She realized in her thirties that her mother didn't understand how to raise her, and didn't know how to deal with the things people were saying about DonnieRae in the streets. Taking into consideration what she now understood about her mother, DonnieRae chose to reconcile with her mother. They have since rebuilt their relationship. Her mother now accepts and loves DonnieRae for the woman she is.

DonnieRae talks about how she's been in Fordyce so long, that she doesn't feel there is a place where she doesn't feel unsafe. She stated that she's shunned at times by the black community; however, she's accepted by the white community. She is okay with it because she is comfortable in who she is and she isn't going to change for anybody. DonnieRae mentioned that she had one LGBTQ+ friend who passed a few years ago. All her friends are heterosexual. She expresses that Fordyce is a slow town in which anyone who is in the LGBTQ+ community usually leaves to go elsewhere to be accepted, avoid the ridicule, and criticism. That is why she feels she is the only person in the LGBTQ+ community that lives in her home town. She doesn't get any type of mental support from an LGBTQ+ space to vent because there simply isn't a community.

The closest church that provides acceptance of her identity is located in Little Rock, Arkansas. However, DonnieRae doesn't attend. DonnieRae says that the churches in Fordyce try to convert her from identifying as a woman. Once DonnieRae finishes her bachelor's degree in special education, she plans to move to a place that is more accepting of the woman she is.

