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houses and houses where people were held hostage, but I never felt the fear doing any of those things that I did in coming out," Walker remembers. "The absolute terror of exposing my inner self. That was my darkest moment."

But afterward, Walker felt as if a weight had been lifted from her shoulders.

"I don't have to lie anymore. I don't have to deceive people. And I'm so comfortable! I don't care that I'm not a petite little thing. Hey, I'm 6-foot-5, and I don't have the best voice, but I'm..."

Her voice fades, hidden in emotion.

"I'm still learning what it is to be a woman," she continues. "I look in the mirror now, and I see a woman. There are still things that are new. I found out there's a power hierarchy from when I left the male world for the female world. And, to some, I'm lower than a female."

Reaction was varied. Some were curious; some thought Walker was joking.

A few guys in the sheriff's department were worried she was going to hit on them. Others thought she had misled or betrayed them, and many felt a loss for the man they knew as Dave.

In all her years serving Yamhill County, Walker says she has had an exemplary record. But in the year after her announcement of a gender change, the department conducted six internal investigations into her performance.

For more than a year, she was pulled off the road as field supervisor and reassigned to a desk job. The sheriff's office says it was an adminis-

trative decision, but Walker thinks she was being hidden away.

Although tension at work has subsided, she faced another challenge in June when budget cuts threatened her job. Walker asserts that a county commissioner hoped to remove her from

the department by eliminating funding for her position.

She says the politician also tried to circumvent an agreement she had with the sheriff and force her instead to accept an entry-level position, stripped of current seniority, rank

and salary. Prepared for a lawsuit, Walker learned only days before the end of her contract that her position as sergeant remained intact for at least another year.

Life outside work was just as much of a challenge. Walker lost her closest friend, and her wife's brother has not been sympathetic.

She also found herself in a lawsuit against a women-only health club she claims discriminated against her. The issue was set-

led out of court with undisclosed terms, and Walker since has been welcomed by another facility in McMinnville. Today, more than a year after her surgery, everyone calls her Debra. People know which pronouns to use.

They have made their adjustment, she says. For the most part, Walker thinks the community has moved on, and she hopes that by sharing her story with the public, she will become less of a curiosity.

"I'm not ashamed of who I am, what I am, who I've been. I have no regrets of my life experience over the last 50 years. I wouldn't be who I am if I weren't male before and had all those experiences as a male who felt she was a female, who finally at 50 got to be a woman. Now I'm living life over and starting again. Not many people in life have that opportunity."

Walker willingly offers advice to other gender dysphoric individuals. "Do what you need to do to be happy," she says. "Your happiness is going to outweigh the problems you have. It's a bumpy road, but eventually you're going to come to the smooth pavement."

"In my law enforcement career, I've kicked down doors of drug houses and houses where people were held hostage, but I never felt the fear doing any of those things that I did in coming out. The absolute terror of exposing my inner self. That was my darkest moment."



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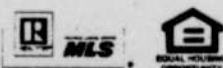
A Linfield College club is a study in diversity

BY TIMOTHY KRAUSE

Through a gay-straight alliance called Fusion, students at McMinnville's Linfield College have an opportunity to address issues focusing on lesbian, gay and bisexual social climates. The club, founded more

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