

OUT ON HER OWN FUTURE FILM MAKER

As a child, Sabrina McCoy's favorite movie was *The Goonies*. She liked it because the kids were just like her – lower-middle class with quirky interests and big imaginations. Even the main character, Mikey, was asthmatic, just like her – both of them carried around inhalers. Most of all, the kids didn't apologize for who they were, even when others put them down.

The movie was formative for McCoy, 34, because when she was a child, she was a boy. She decided to transition to female six years ago, a decision that put her on her own adventure and changed life as she knew it. She quit her job, divorced her wife and moved to Portland, where she began a new career – film. She now attends Portland State University, where she's pursuing a degree in film production.

"They say entertainment is all escapist," McCoy says, "but when you're growing up in a horrible environment and you don't have a lot of support...that escapist type stuff is all you have."

McCoy grew up in a conservative factory town, Rockford, Ill., just outside of Chicago. McCoy can point to clues that she was transgender as a child, like throwing tantrums when her mother would try to put her in "boy clothes." By the time McCoy was in college, she had figured out that she was gender variant. But because of her conservative surroundings, she says, she suppressed it. She finished college, got married, got a steady job and bought a house.

"But you can only put something in the back of your mind for so long before it basically breaks wide open," she says.

The breaking point came for McCoy on Memorial Day on 2006. She was hanging out with her wife at another couples house watching anime. Between drinks, the women started talking about their likes and dislikes about bras – which brands they like, which stores are better, how annoying it is when the underwire digs in on one side.

What struck McCoy about this conversation was how easily and immediately she was able to jump in and contribute to it – she had after all, been experimenting with cross dressing. But when she did jump in, she could practically hear the scratch on the record player.

"They looked at me and said, 'Wait a minute. How do you know about that?'" McCoy recalls. "And then a switch in my head switched over and I was like, 'Boom. I was female.'"

What followed can safely be described as dramatic. McCoy's wife already

knew she was gender variant – McCoy had told her before they got married – but when McCoy decided to transition to female, her wife said she couldn't be in a romantic relationship any more. McCoy's revelation wasn't the only thing that led to the couple's divorce, to be sure, but it played a large part.

So McCoy started rebuilding what would be a new life for her. She met another woman online (McCoy identifies as a trans lesbian), and the two soon developed a long-distance relationship. After McCoy finalized her divorce, sold her house and tied up some other loose ends, she decided to move to be with her girlfriend – in Portland.

"For me, a kid from Illinois, you grow up with cornfields and it's flat," McCoy says. "The Pacific Northwest was sort of like this magical beautiful land of coasts and caves and hills and evergreen trees and absolutely gorgeous scenery. So it kind of became a dream of mine to be out here one day."

Once in Portland, like so many others, she was unable to find steady work. Her main concern was medical insurance; since she was transgender, she wanted it as soon as possible. The easiest way to get it, she thought, would be to go back to school.

And while she was changing things up, she thought, "I may as well go and study a new field to try and better my career chances," she says. "And I might as well study something I love." She chose film.

When she graduates, she wants to create a documentary that shows transgender people in a positive light. Essentially, she wants to make the film she could have shown her parents when she came out of the closet.

"When I came out to my parents," she says, "they were like, 'What does this mean? How should we react?' I didn't have any good answers."

Her mom struck out on her own for information. She ended up going to a video store, where she was told to watch *TransAmerica* – a film that for a mother learning what to expect from her child's life, McCoy calls "problematic."

McCoy wants to make the film she could have shown her mother.

"I want to show that trans people can have relationships and jobs and that some of them do really great things," McCoy says. "Basically a documentary film that shows trans people living normally."