

THIS PHOTO ALSO BROKE THE INTERNET: AYDIAN AND JENILEE DOWLING POSE IN THEIR WHITEAKER HOME



TRANSCENDENT MAN

Eugene trans activist Aydian Dowling uses newfound viral stardom to shine light on trans issues

Sitting in Sweet Life Patisserie in the Whiteaker, Aydian Dowling discusses the meaning of “going viral” — or gaining instant fame via the internet.

“Once we hit 200,000 views on just the BuzzFeed page,” he says, “we were like, ‘What does it mean to go viral?’” He laughs. “I think when we break a million, we’ll say that we went viral.”

Dowling and friend Jason Ballard did break a million views; in fact, Ballard says on Upworthy.com alone, they’ve surpassed the 2.5 million mark, making international headlines from the *Huffington Post* to *The Advocate* to the *Daily Mail*.

At the heart of this overnight celebrity is a photo Ballard posted on BuzzFeed Feb. 17. He recently took the shot of Dowling and his wife, Jenilee Dowling, in the living room of their Whiteaker home. The image mirrors a now iconic 2011 photograph of Adam Levine (lead singer for Maroon 5) and his then girlfriend, taken for *Cosmopolitan UK* to raise awareness for testicular cancer.

In Ballard’s version, Dowling, like Levine, stands nude; his muscular tattooed physique is front and center, a neatly trimmed beard and tousled mohawk framing his gaze. Jenilee Dowling’s hands reach up from out of frame, coyly covering the family jewels.

For how fierce the picture is, Aydian Dowling says he did need some cajoling from Ballard to be so vulnerable, and, he jokes, his wife requested a manicure.

The trio recreated the shot to raise awareness for the transgender community, specifically the FTM (or female-to-male) community. Both Dowling and Ballard are FTM transgender men.

“In my mind, he was cover-model worthy,” says Ballard, who runs the burgeoning *FTM Magazine* — a quarterly publication “dedicated to the lives and culture of the FTM and Trans-masculine community” — out of Rochester, New York. The shot in question is, in fact, just a promo for the spring issue on which Dowling will grace the cover, out April 1.

It is more than Dowling’s good looks that qualify him as cover-worthy; at just 27, he is a preeminent trans activist, having documented his transition, beginning five years ago from the stage of “pre-hormones,” or pre-hormone replacement therapy, to present day via his YouTube channel, ALionsFear, gaining thousands of followers and hundreds of thousands of views.

The Dowlings also appeared on MTV in 2012 for Dan Savage’s *It Gets Better*, a special documenting the struggles and triumphs of LGBTQ youth. The MTV crew followed the couple as they prepared for their wedding, tagging along with Dowling as he tried on tuxedos, as well as when he revealed to their officiant that he was a trans man — the first time he had officially “come out” to anyone beyond his closest friends and family.

The couple, originally from Long Island, moved to Eugene for Jenilee Dowling’s job in February 2014. Soon after arriving, Aydian Dowling went to hear trans activist Ryan Sallans speak at the UO, where he met Cass Averill, founder and facilitator of TransPonder, a local monthly gathering for trans-identified or questioning people. Averill introduced Dowling to the Redoux Parlour, where he works part time, spending the rest of his time running his company Point 5cc, a transgender and LGBT apparel company.

“It’s called Point 5cc because that’s the average amount of hormone replacement therapy that a trans man would

PHOTO BY JASON BALLARD