



# WHO I AM. WHO I AM. BECOMING.

**A 2ND STORY STUDY GUIDE**  
INSPIRED BY ORIGINAL STORIES FROM  
CAMERON PENTIMONE & CHRIS THOREN



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# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Welcome to our study guide.

We are a collective of story-makers and story-lovers committed to building a more empathetic world by sharing one great story at a time. We believe in the unique power of sharing one's personal story.

This guide takes a closer look at two stories.

Cameron Pentimone's *What The Pictures Showed* guides listeners through a moment when Cameron grappled with the decision to share a long-held secret with their partner.

In Chris Thoren's *Have You Tried?*, they recount discovering their non-binary identity and how fashion helped bring that discovery into the light.

Inside this study guide, you will find activities, an interview with Cameron and Chris, and historical and contextual information that will add to your understanding of these stories. On our website you can find additional resources and related learning standards.

To use this guide in any capacity, please start by listening to both stories, available on the 2nd Story website at [2ndStory.com/studyguides](https://2ndStory.com/studyguides).

Happy listening! Happy learning!

The 2nd Story Collective



# START TALKING.

2nd Story uses **true, first-person stories** as an entry-point for conversation. After listening to Cameron Pentimone's *What The Pictures Showed* and Chris Thoren's *Have You Tried?*, use the following questions for a guided discussion.

## GROUP AGREEMENTS

When sharing personal narratives, stories, and sensitive information, we begin by establishing the following agreements with participants. Before beginning your discussion, we recommend going over the following group agreements. When finished, ask them, "Do you agree?" and then have them collectively and vocally respond with "I agree."

1. What is learned here leaves here. What is said here stays here.
2. Take care of yourself.
3. Practice equity by sharing the floor.
4. Stay curious.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What is the role that community plays in each of their stories? How do their communities either show up for or shun them?
- Where do you see moments of bravery or courage?
- What roles do society and societal expectations play in these stories?
- How do Cameron and Chris seek support?
- Are there moments of fear? When and why?
- Are there moments that feel familiar to your life? Why or why not?
- What is something new you learned from these stories?

# PRONOUNS PRIMER

BY STEF COLEMAN, ARTISTIC PROGRAMS INTERN

**Pro·noun** /ˈprɒˌnoʊn/  
noun

- a word that can function by itself as a noun phrase and that refers either to the participants in the discourse (e.g., I, you ) or to someone or something mentioned elsewhere in the discourse (e.g., she, it, this, they).
- he/him/his - pronouns referring to someone who identifies as a gender male
- she/her/hers - pronouns referring to someone who identifies as a gender female
- they/them/theirs - pronouns referring to someone who identifies as non-binary or someone who embraces gender fluidity
- Ze/zir/zirs, hir/hirs - pronouns referring to someone who identifies as non-binary without the constraints of masculine/feminine/neutral pronouns

Did you know that in 2019 Miriam Webster officially added they/them usage to its examples of pronouns? But this isn't a new jump. In fact, the singular "they" pronoun has been in use since the 1300s,<sup>1</sup> according to Merriam-Webster, and it had already been included in the company's dictionary as a gender-neutral way to refer to someone whose identity is unknown or whose existence is hypothetical. What's new is its use as a pronoun for individuals who identify as nonbinary.

To those who are reluctant to embrace the singular "they" for grammatical reasons, Emily Brewster, a senior editor at Merriam-Webster, pointed out that this kind of shift in the use of a pronoun has happened before. If people could adapt to it then, she said, they can learn to embrace it now.

"The word 'you' used to be only plural, which is why we still use the plural verb. We say 'you are' even though we're only speaking to one person," she said. "We also must adapt to the 'they are' for an individual person, and we can."<sup>2</sup>

**"TIME CHANGES ALL THINGS; THERE IS NO REASON WHY LANGUAGE SHOULD ESCAPE THIS UNIVERSAL LAW."**

FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE, SWISS LINGUIST



## ALLYSHIP

Allyship is the ongoing process of building relationships with marginalized groups and/or individuals based on trust, consistency, and holding oneself accountable. This work requires active listening, recognition of one's own biases, and reflection on identity and privilege.

One way we can begin to ally with non-binary friends, co-workers, and loved ones is to ask for their preferred pronouns and change our pronoun usage. If you make a mistake, that's okay! A simple apology and commitment to use the correct pronoun is all that's needed. As in so many areas of our lives, once we know better, we must do better.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/singular-nonbinary-they>  
<sup>2</sup> Knox, Liam. "Merriam-Webster adds non-binary 'they' pronoun to dictionary.

# GLOSSARY OF GENDER TERMS

ADAPTED FROM LAMBDA LEGAL

The following is a selected list of LGBTQ terms adapted from Lambda Legal that are relevant to these two stories. Lambda Legal is the oldest and largest national legal organization whose mission is to achieve full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people, and everyone living with HIV through impact litigation, education, and public policy work. Visit [www.lambdalegal.org](http://www.lambdalegal.org) for additional resources.

**ALLY:** A person who may not share the sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBTQ people, but who supports and honors sexual and gender diversity and challenges homophobic, transphobic, and heterosexist remarks and behaviors.

**GENDER:** A set of social, physical, psychological, and emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual as feminine, masculine, androgynous, etc.

**GENDER EXPRESSION:** The outward manifestation of internal gender identity, through clothing, hairstyle, mannerisms, and other characteristics.

**GENDER-FLUID:** Term used by people who identify their gender as fluid within a spectrum of gender identities and expression. Gender-fluid people may or may not also identify as transgender.

**GENDER IDENTITY:** An individual's inner sense of being male, female, or another gender. Gender identity is not necessarily the same as sex assigned (or presumed) at birth. Everyone has a gender identity.

**GENDER-NONCONFORMING:** Behaving in a way that does not match social stereotypes about female or male gender, usually through dress or physical appearance.

**GENDER ROLE:** The social expectation of how an individual should look or behave, often based upon the sex assigned at birth.

**GENDER TRANSITION:** This term describes both a shift over time from occupying the social role of one gender to that of another and to the medical procedures that sometimes accompany that shift. Transition may or may not include medical or legal aspects such as taking hormones, having surgeries, or changing identity documents to reflect one's gender identity.

**OUT:** A description for someone who expresses, or does not hide, his or her sexual orientation or gender identity.

**QUEER:** A traditionally pejorative term for LGBTQ people that has been reclaimed by some LGBTQ activists, who use it self-descriptively as a means to empower the LGBTQ community.

**QUESTIONING:** A term that describes someone who is unsure of his or her sexual orientation or gender identity.

**TRANSGENDER:** Refers to people whose gender identity, one's inner sense of being male, female, or something else, differs from their assigned (or presumed) sex at birth.

**TRANSGENDER MAN:** Describes the trajectory of a person who is changing or has changed their body and lived gender role from a birth-assigned female to an affirmed male. Also: trans male, trans man, FTM or transman.

**TRANSGENDER WOMAN:** Describes the trajectory of a person who is changing or has changed their body and lived gender role from a birth-assigned male to an affirmed female. Also: trans woman, MTF or trans female.

**TRANSPHOBIA:** The fear or hatred of transgender people, often expressed as discrimination, harassment, and violence.

# AND THE STORY CONTINUES

A CONVERSATION WITH  
CAMERON PENTIMONE &  
CHRIS THOREN

BY MAX SPITZ, 2ND STORY COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR



**Cameron Pentimone** earned their BFA in Graphic Design from the American Academy of Art in Chicago and is proud to be a Company Member and Graphic Designer with 2nd Story. Previously, they have been a layout designer for the Chicago-based magazine, *Newcity*, a teaching assistant at the Hyde Park Art Center's summer creativity camps for children, and developed promotional materials for *Cabinalysis*, a show written and performed by Dr. Lawrence Kerns at the Minnesota and Chicago Fringe Festivals.

**Chris Thoren** is a freelance director, developer of new works, and storyteller. In addition to multiple turns as a director at 2nd Story, they have worked on directing teams at Writers Theatre, The House Theatre of Chicago, and more.



## Let's start with the two of you telling our readers a little about yourselves.

**Cameron:** I am a visual artist and a writer, and grew up just outside of Chicago in the Northwest suburbs near O'Hare. As a teenager, I spent a decent amount of time in the city, went to college in the city, and finally moved to the city when I was 24. Chicago always beckoned, so I always showed up.

**Chris:** I grew up in the Northern suburbs of Chicago. We never moved growing up, so the first time I changed living environments was when I came to the city to study Theatre and English at Loyola University Chicago. I graduated into the Chicago arts scene and pursued an artistic career primarily as a stage director, particularly of new work.

## What role does story play in your life?

**Chris:** I'm someone who has always been drawn to strong stories—in my media, in my artistic practice, and among friends. When I found a career (read: day job) that I knew I could be passionate about, it allowed me to take a step back and see what kind of art I wanted to make and why.

**Cameron:** Storytelling has allowed me to facilitate connections with others (and with myself!). It's through storytelling that I have been able to communicate moments in my life that mean something to me, but in a way that feels accessible to others.

## That's a perfect segue to my next question! Why did you want to tell this story?

**Chris:** I had to. This story is about me coming to understand my gender identity, and writing it was an incredibly important part in my personal growth. When I first put on a dress and felt all the feelings I describe in the story, I knew all I had done was open a door. Writing this story is walking through it and getting to know the next room.

**Cameron:** Exploring my gender was like setting sail across an ocean of information in a little boat without a compass and with head full of questions like: "Okay, I don't think I'm cis, so do I also need to revisit and rename my sexuality? How do I know which gender identity matches my identity? Do non-binary people take hormones?"

The story explores the lack of support systems that were available to me when I was growing up and the ways that I took it upon myself to fill those voids in private. Following those experiences, I was so comforted by the unflinching, genuine acceptance that my partner Scott showed me the moment I came out to him. Receiving love and recognition around something I'd kept hidden for so long was monumental for me. I told this story to honor that moment.

## Support systems play such an important role in both of your stories. What did those systems look like?

**Cameron:** When I came out publicly, I learned a lot about how I define this. I asked people who had been in my life for many years up to that point to please start calling me Cameron and use they/them pronouns when referring to me. I noticed that this was a sort of a quick'n easy adjustment for some and challenging, on different levels, for others. At that time, and still now, it is how people communicate those challenges to me that has helped me shape my definition of what support looks like for me. I of course cannot define what support does or does not look like for another human.

**Chris:** This is a good question. This all comes with one giant caveat. This is my personal opinion and my personal perspective as someone who is transfeminine, with my specific support system and in my specific metropolitan community.

I'll be real—I hate the word ally. It's so wrapped up in performance and politics that I roll my eyes if someone calls themselves an ally or asks how they can be an ally. It feels like they're looking for me to tell them how to be a good person, and it also puts me on the spot to suddenly be a political organizer and activist. It's like going to a farm-to-table brunch restaurant and asking the server how best to support sustainable farming practices.

Like most things, the best way to be an ally is to make yourself a safe and lovely person to be oneself around.

**"THIS STORY IS ABOUT ME COMING TO UNDERSTAND MY GENDER IDENTITY, AND WRITING IT WAS AN INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT PART IN MY PERSONAL GROWTH. WHEN I FIRST PUT ON A DRESS AND FELT ALL THE FEELINGS I DESCRIBE IN THE STORY, I KNEW ALL I HAD DONE WAS OPEN A DOOR. WRITING THIS STORY IS WALKING THROUGH IT AND GETTING TO KNOW THE NEXT ROOM."**

CHRIS THOREN

**What are ways that an individual can show that they are an ally without it feeling like a performance?**

Chris: The first and basic level is letting the world know you're, as I like to say, "cool with gender stuff."

This means:

- listing your pronouns in your Twitter bio or email signature. This signals to the universe, "hey, I know what pronouns are and I know that they change person to person."
- avoiding gendered language. This is an adjustment (I still use "guys" all the time). Don't make a huge deal out of it, just try your best!
- posting on social media in support of trans\* rights, progressive politics, etc. That's my go to cue to know what list to put you on if your friend me on Facebook.
- being visible with your support. Once, I got emotional when my cis friend threw her purse over her shoulder and it had a "trans women are women" button on it.

Cameron: Here's the thing. When I came out publicly some people were confused and had some (or many) questions, but that was usually okay! The difference was that their confusion appeared to be couched in a clear desire to want to learn.

As I meet and come out to new people now, I generally feel the most supported when they continue to be themselves around me while referring to me by my name and pronouns (and understanding that mistakes happen, but not dwelling on them when they do).

**Was it difficult to find allies or seek understanding?**

Cameron: Despite some of the reactions I received when I first came out, I'd say no. I am profoundly lucky to be able to say that I was able to find not only one, but several communities where it feels safe to be myself.

Chris: I've had next to no trouble being accepted by most of my community, at least not to my knowledge. From former teachers to the married high school classmates to coworkers—they've all been validating on a variety of all levels. I've had so many folks from my past reach out and thank me, and more than one person that has since come out as trans\* has told me my journey had inspired them.

**Was there ever a part of your journey that was scary?**

Chris: Literally all of it.

Cameron: Definitely. At worst, there have been moments that I have felt concerned for my personal safety. Though, it should be said that I am very privileged to not have to experience this fear on a daily or even consistent basis. Many trans\* people do.

**How has your relationship to your wardrobe changed? What goes through your mind when choosing an outfit?**

Cameron: I think my relationship to my wardrobe has only changed in that I currently wear more gender neutral or "masculine" coded clothing pretty much exclusively. I try not to force anything that doesn't feel quite right.

Chris: My first thought when getting dressed is "who will I see today?", followed closely by "where will I go today?" I run the list of who I will see through the filter of how supportive they are and ask what context I'll see them in. Same with the location question—am I going to a traditionally gendered space? If I have to go to the bathroom there, what will happen? Armed with all that information, I do a gut check to see what I want to wear.

**How do you decide what you will/will not wear to a given occasion?**

Chris: I don't see this as very different from what any cis person goes through. You're not going to wear a ballgown to the office or high heels to help a friend move or sweatpants on a first date. That said, the stakes are higher when I know people will see me as a man in a dress, and will have an opinion about it, and it will put my safety at risk. I have to be ready to be armored and confident, even if it's on a video call or while walking the dog.

**Do you choose to "present" differently when in a professional/workplace setting?**

Cameron: For the last few years, I've been enormously privileged to be able to work in really inclusive and affirming spaces. I have honestly not really had to worry about this too much. When I came out, I was working at an art store and the entire staff was quickly affirming and supportive. And though my current role reads more corporate on paper, I have not really had to change anything about my presentation at work.

Chris: Yes. I'm privileged in that my coworkers are all very accepting and kind, and I present femme on days where I do not have external meetings. It's an incredibly vulnerable thing to open that part of myself up at work. I'm so much more susceptible to taking criticism personally, to being more self-conscious if something goes wrong. That's something I'm working on presently—turning the joy, comfort, and warmth I feel presenting femme into professional confidence. The story isn't over.

# GENDER NONCONFORMITY THROUGHOUT HISTORY

BY MAX SPITZ, 2ND STORY COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

Sometimes it can feel like conversations about gender and identity are a new phenomenon. However, people have known that gender is a spectrum for centuries; it just hasn't always looked like the way it looks now. Follow along here for a brief look into how Trans and Nonbinary identities have existed and evolved over many years.

Note: While the identities are old, many of the terms we use now are new. Because of that, some of our older examples may look or feel different from our modern ones.

## ANCIENT EGYPT (2000-1800 BCE)

Hieroglyphics from this era list three distinct genders: male, sekhet, and female. While exact definitions of sekhet vary, it still marks an early appearance of a culture defining gender outside the binary.

## THE PUBLIC UNIVERSAL FRIEND (1752-1819)

The Public Universal Friend (P.U.F.), born Jemima Wilkinson, experienced a religious awakening as a young adult and from the point on traveled through the United States evangelizing. They refused to answer to their birth name and used only gender-neutral pronouns. This extended to legal documents and private writings. They preached free will and abolition of slavery as the leader of the Society of Universal Friends.

## CLAUDE CAHUN (1894-1954) & MARCEL MOORE (1892-1972)

Prominent photographers in French surrealism, Cahun and Moore both adopted gender-neutral names and identities early in their artistic careers. They were well-known for portraiture, with Cahun as a favorite subject. The couple began their relationship while they were teens and remained together until Cahun's death. Cahun wrote in their autobiography, "Neuter is the only gender that always suits me."

## THOMAS(INE) HALL (1603-?)

Raised female from birth, Thomas adopted a male name and identity in order to join the English military. After their service, Hall continued to live their life swapping between male and female name, dress, and identity. However, due to strict religious laws, they were eventually brought to trial. The examinations could not determine Hall's gender through biology (it is assumed they were intersex), and so Hall was sentenced to wear both men's and women's clothing, as they were considered to be both a man and a woman.

## HARRY ALLAN/LIVINGSTON (1882-1922)

Harry began dressing as a boy at a young age in order to find work. However, all reports show that he lived as male as early as his teenage years. Living in the Pacific Northwest, Harry was a figure of controversy as a thief, but the controversy grew when his trans identity came to light. Newspapers actively refused to use his chosen name and male pronouns even when discussing Harry's dislike for his assigned name and gender. An early example of the potential harm in misgendering, Harry fell into substance abuse in his later years.



## GLADYS BENTLEY (1907-1960)

Living in the height of the Harlem Renaissance, Gladys Bentley's popularity began due to her musical talent, but skyrocketed with her persona. She wore tuxedos and top hats while she performed and actively flaunted her identity as a lesbian. However, public opinion steadily changed, and by the 1950s Bentley's stage persona had become increasingly controversial.

## YOUNG THUG (1991-)

Young Thug has gone on record that he does not believe in gender. While Young Thug has not made any statements about his personal identity, he regularly wears dresses and other stereotypically-female outfits. These fashion choices continue to fight against stereotypes about the hip-hop community that Young Thug is a part of.

## SAM SMITH (1992-)

Sam Smith first came out publicly as a gay man in 2014 when their fame grew along with the release of their first album *In The Lonely Hour*. Since then, they have shared their transition process with the world, first coming out as genderqueer, and recently nonbinary.

## JADEN SMITH (1998-)

Jaden Smith made fashion history by being the first man to model "women's clothing" for Louis Vuitton in 2016. He followed this by founding his own actively genderfluid clothing line, MSFTSrep. Smith continues to champion the idea that clothing has no gender in his daily fashion sense.

## ZAYA WADE (2008-)

Zaya Wade, daughter of Dwayne Wade and step-daughter of Gabrielle Union, came out as transgender early in 2020. While Zaya herself has remained mostly out of the spotlight, Wade and Union have vociferously supported her trans identity from the moment her transition became public.

**"...YOU JUST TRY TO PUT THEM IN THE BEST SITUATIONS TO BE ABLE TO SUCCEED IN LIFE. HOW I DO THAT, AND HOW ME AND MY WIFE DECIDE TO DO THAT, MAY BE DIFFERENT THAN ANOTHER FAMILY, BUT WE WANT THEM TO KNOW THERE'S ALWAYS UNCONDITIONAL LOVE, THAT [THERE] WILL ALWAYS BE SUPPORT. WE'VE GOT YOU, NO MATTER WHAT. AND WE SEE YOU. I SEE YOU HOW YOU SEE YOU."**

DWAYNE WADE, ZAYA WADE'S FATHER

# PUT THE PEN TO PAPER

At 2nd Story we believe that sharing first-person, true stories has the power to change hearts and minds, and we want to know what stories are living inside of you.

We invite you to share your story. Below are several writing prompts that you can use to share a story from your own life that parallels the themes and ideas in this real-life story. Select a prompt and begin writing on the next page!

## SHARE A MOMENT WHEN YOU:

- LEARNED SOMETHING NEW ABOUT YOURSELF**
- DEFENDED YOUR IDENTITY**
- CHALLENGED THE WAY OTHERS SAW YOU**
- WERE SUPPORTED BY FRIENDS OR FAMILY**
- WERE UNBELIEVABLY BRAVE OR COURAGEOUS**
- WERE NERVOUS TO TELL SOMEONE SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF**
- WERE ON A JOURNEY THAT OTHERS DID NOT UNDERSTAND**



**EXPLORING MY GENDER WAS LIKE  
SETTING SAIL ACROSS AN OCEAN  
OF INFORMATION IN A LITTLE BOAT  
WITHOUT A COMPASS AND WITH A  
HEAD FULL OF QUESTIONS.**

CAMERON PENTIMONE



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