

## MY TRANSPHOBIC HELL ON



**POTTING ON A BRANZ FINE**  
Adrienne and her partner have suffered a string of abuse from company

## Couple tell how they live in fear after countless attacks

By Angela Rainey

**A MARRIED Belfast couple have told how they have been repeatedly victims of sickening "transphobic" attacks.**

Adrienne and Paul Elson - who are both transgender - have suffered more than 100 such attacks with some of the anti-social tormentors being as young as six years old.

"It happens so often, we've walked past bus stops and had people, young people especially, call us 'faggots,'" said Adrienne.

"It would just be nice to be able to walk down the street without people shouting at me," added Paul, who has personally faced 80 of the attacks and who asked us not to use his real first name in this article.

In an exclusive interview with Sunday Life the church-going couple told how they were forced to leave their home after being repeatedly intimidated and harassed - and they quit their church after being told not to hold hands.

Railway worker Adrienne, 45, was born a male and is now a woman while Paul was born woman but is now male. Both are diagnosed with autism.

Adrienne, formerly an Orangeman called Adrian, said they faced abuse in the street as well as vile attacks on their former property which they left three years ago.

The couple said:

- stones were thrown at their windows;
- dog excrement and chewing gum was smeared on their front door;
- Their car was scratched and tyres slashed;
- A boy of seven tried to rip Paul's shirt off.

Adrienne stressed that the vast majority of people in their former neighbourhood were fine but a tiny minority tormented them.

### STRESSFUL

Referred to as "transphobic attacks" - the number of incidents against people who are undergoing gender reassignment or who have already made the transition to change their gender here, increased to 23 last year.

The figure had steadily declined from 2006 when 32 incidents were reported dipping in 2011 to their lowest ever at four.

Adrienne, originally from the Wirral in Merseyside, says she no longer likes to go out alone at night.

"When I was male I would never have



**LIFE CHANGE:** When Adrienne was Adrian

thought twice about going out when I wanted or if I was on my own.

"But now I think twice about it. I understand it now, when women say they don't feel safe walking alone when it's dark or walking past a crowd of youths or men - it can be very intimidating especially when they are all looking at you and leering. I prefer to have Paul with me.

"You can feel a knot in your stomach and see by the look on some peoples' faces whether they are going to say something.

"Your fight or flight mechanism is always on. It's a stressful way to live when you are always on high alert."

Although the pair, who married last year, have never been physically attacked, Adrienne had a narrow escape in a pub in Liverpool when a gang of men, egged on by a woman, cornered her in a pub.

The pair say that even walking past a bus shelter or having a quiet drink has led to them to being abused in public.

"We were sitting in a quiet booth in a bar when a man poked his head in and

asked: 'Is this a gay thing or something?'

'We were minding our own business. But we find that people approach us when they wouldn't do it to another couple.'

'We get people asking if we are gay and asking about our sex lives - questions you just wouldn't ask random strangers.'

'Even just walking past a bus stop, your mind is scanning the people around and you're wondering if that person will be the one who shouts something at you.'

'It happens so often. We've also had a juice carton thrown at us - we cross the road to avoid any trouble.'

Paul, 38, who identifies as a "trans-man" and is too frightened to be identified in this article, has faced the worst abuse.

He said: "Where I was living before, people knew I was transitioning and knew my birth name and would scream it in the street. I would often get people shouting at me and staring through my windows, a frightening experience."

### SNUBS

'They'd say things like 'are you a boy or a girl?' or 'get your c\*\*k out.'

'I've even had people knock on my door and ask me if I am gay or not. I've had stones thrown at my windows and at me and my satellite dish was damaged.'

'On one occasion a seven-year-old boy walked into my home and attempted to rip my shirt off.'

'It would just be nice to be able to walk down the street without people shouting at me.'

Despite both being church-goers, and Adrienne, who was also a former member of the Orange Order, say they have even faced adversity from some parishioners who refused to refer to the couple by their names.

The repeated snubs led Paul to attend services wearing a sign with his name on it.



**INTIMIDATION:** Adrienne receives abuse on the street and (inset) her car has been scratched

They say they've also had to move church after being asked not to hold hands during the service.

On one occasion, it is alleged, that a parishioner announced in the service that Paul 'should strip naked so everyone can see what sex you are'.

Since 2010, Adrienne and Paul have been attending the Butterfly Club in Belfast, which supports the transgender community. The pair met there in 2012 before becoming an item months later.

Adrienne added: "People think being transgender is some sort of deviancy, some sort of sexual fetish but I can assure them that it certainly is not."

'It's not an easy life, it's not a thrill. I know it's a cliché but I am a woman in the wrong body.'

'It requires a lot of patience because you come up against so many hurdles.'

'What is always at the back of your

mind is, is this the day I'm going to be badly beaten? Could today bring a violent incident?'

'I am not an aggressive person so I worry about something happening to Paul and me. I'm definitely more afraid of men than women.'

'Sometimes I wonder whether we should move to Brighton or Manchester. I have it built up in my head as some promised land but realistically, there's no reason to think it might be better.'

'I remember going out in public (as a woman) for the first time around 2011 and how anxious it felt - it took a long time to build up the confidence because I made a lot of mistakes.'

'As a man I was so used to having pockets in my trousers but when I became a woman I would wear shorts with a top and tights and people would stare at me.'

'But I realise now that it was because I was dressing too young for my age, I was dressing like a teenager because the shorts had pockets in them. The dress code is more rigidly defined for women and I realise that now. I've learned to adapt to being a woman in a patriarchal society and the Butterfly Club has supported me.'

'I used to think about the past to relive fond memories or think about the future but I'm now 45 and for the first time I am living in the here and now.'

'Being transgender has taught me a lot of lessons in life. I am now living the real me not just the made up character of Adrian that could have come from a TV series, the Adrian that people liked, and to be honest I had become fond of. But it was just a mask shielding the real me - Adrienne.'

'It would just be nice if people realised that we are just a normal people who are really the same as everyone else.'

Members of the transgender community, aged 18 plus, whether they are "out" or not, can find support at The Butterfly Club in Belfast. Anyone interested in attending should email: [trans@belfastbutterflyclub.co.uk](mailto:trans@belfastbutterflyclub.co.uk)