

PAST THE PATCH

CONNECTING WITH THE HUMANS
BENEATH THE UNIFORM

Donovan August

*Finding Our Place
In The World*

EDITION 4



FINDING OUR PLACE IN THE WORLD

Spotlighting Donovan August

The world is a pretty big place, but for Donovan August, it didn't always feel that way.

"I went to a one-room Amish-Mennonite school that only went to the 8th grade and I homeschooled myself through high school." Donovan, a non-binary transmasculine person, was raised in a conservative Mennonite church in Lancaster County, and most of their relatives were old-order Mennonite. But for some, what might appear as a picture of close-knit community, for Donovan, the experience was quite the opposite, "Growing up," he says, "I often had a feeling of being lost."

His world was small and structured—but it also felt suffocating. Being raised as a Mennonite girl and having the identity of a future wife and mother laid out before them amplified feelings of confusion, disorientation and shame, especially in a time where they didn't have the language to express why, "I was worried I wasn't Godly or Christian enough, and that's why I was having these feelings." As a teen, while many of his peers looked to the possibilities of the future as a North Star, Donovan found only clouds in his night sky: "I could never visualize myself as an adult and was convinced that I was going to die as a teenager—I could never see myself past that point."

That all started to change at about nineteen when they decided to go to EMT school. After obtaining their EMT certification at Reading Hospital school of Health Sciences, Donovan began volunteering at Fivepointville EMS and, upon realizing they wanted to pursue being an EMT full time, began at Lancaster EMS in December of 2015.

While the First Responder scene wasn't exactly new—among his relatives, several were firefighters—stepping into a fresh career proved to be more than just a 'job': "There was an entire world I was missing out on."

Nearing 21, Donovan would soon move out of their parents' house and leave the church behind, along with most of their family and friends; and two years after starting at Lancaster EMS, they would begin pursuing their childhood dream of becoming a paramedic. Like many fellow First Responders, Donovan's passion was born out of a desire to help others—but he also had a deep admiration for health science, "I find anything related to medicine and the human body fascinating. Just how the human body integrates all its systems and has to work together—no body system can operate on its own."

It wasn't long before Donovan started yearning to do more for his patients, "I considered becoming a critical care or flight paramedic," But after toying with the idea of pursuing nursing, he realized something, "If I am going to go back to school, I may as well shoot for the moon and try for medical school to become a physician." So in 2020, Donovan would take yet another big leap in their medical career by going back to school to obtain a bachelor's degree in biology.

But while the journey was an exciting one, it was also hard—really hard—and not just because of all the tests and the textbooks: Once away from the place (and the people) he'd known all his life, Donovan was finally beginning to process years of childhood trauma, "That year I spent in [paramedic] school was rough—I went through a long period of depression."

All hope was not lost, however, as they found community amongst their peers, "Most of my coworkers were supportive, if not curious of my decision to leave the church," they explained, "I found my family here at work."

With time, therapy and the support of their newfound friends, Donovan would pull through; and soon, working through the pain of the past would serve as the foundation for yet another transformation to take place. In the summer of 2021, Donovan would come out as a non-binary transgender man. That following fall, they would pursue and start receiving gender-affirming care.

Growing up, Donovan struggled with not knowing who he was. The same cannot be said today, "I am quite confident in my identity. I feel confident while in my uniform and I wear my pronoun badge with pride."

Not only is Donovan assured in where they are now, but they also feel optimistic in where they're going. Come this fall, Donovan will begin their junior year at Millersville University, "Learning about medicine and the human body is hard," he explains, "There are days that are rough, where you just want to give up the career you love because you don't feel like you're making a difference or you're just burned out." But there is also nobility in the pursuit, "A Doctor once told me, 'If you're upset after a rough day or a bad call, that means you still care. If you finish a bad shift and you're not affected, then you need to step away from medicine for a bit because you've lost your empathy.'"

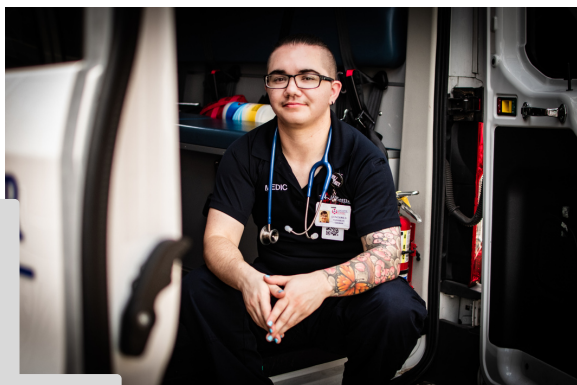
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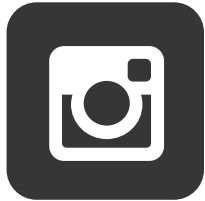
When it comes to medicine, Donovan recognizes your capacity for compassion is just as important as your technical skills, "I want to be the provider that patients remember as the one that was understanding and kind to them." He often pulls from his own hardships, serving as an advocate for LGBTQ+ patients, educating fellow paramedics and EMTs on the issues afflicting this demographic to ensure they can provide the highest quality care possible. In an ever evolving world, it's important that diversity is reflected equally in the workforce, especially in healthcare where our wellbeing often lies in the hands of other people.

"If you are struggling with your identity or are finding it difficult to look to the future," he urges, "find your people. Explore the world." But above all else, he encourages others to embrace their innate authenticity, "It's not worth sacrificing yourself or your identity to make other people happy or comfortable. Wear what makes you happy and be whoever you want to be."





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