

'I was always like this. You just didn't know it.'

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cjs@tulane.edu

"As far back as I have memory, one thing was very clear: I felt like a boy." Chaz Bono spoke in matter-of-fact, calm tones to explain to a Tulane University audience on Monday (April 22) what life was like before he transitioned from a female to a male, describing how he never felt that he fit in anywhere. "I don't feel that way anymore."



Joining the TV show "Dancing With the Stars" in 2011 was an opportunity "to reach a huge audience," about his transition, said Chaz Bono, who has lost 65 pounds since that appearance. (Photo by Sally Asher)

The author of three books and the only child of celebrity entertainers Sonny and Cher, Bono wants "to bring understanding and light to this issue in a non-threatening way."

He spoke in McAlister Auditorium in the semester's final Direction program, sponsored by Tulane University Campus Programming.

In his early 30s [Bono](#) said he finally came to terms with the conflict between being born female and his internal gender identity as a male. He decided to identify as a man and take the name "Chaz," documenting his transition in a 2011 book and a

documentary film.

“People look at transitioning as becoming a different person, but I was always like this,” he said, gesturing toward himself. “You just didn't know it.”

It took him nearly a decade to work through his fears of making the transition to “Chaz.” Because of being from a celebrity family, Bono knew he couldn't do it privately. He said he feared becoming “a national joke.”

Deciding “this is my life, my only life,” he moved ahead, talking first with his mother, Cher, who he said was initially very supportive. Their relationship grew strained, and they didn't speak for a year, “but it's starting to get a lot better now.”

That puzzled one audience member, who during the Q&A session pointed out how Cher has been supportive of the lesbian and gay community ? “a gay icon, even.” Bono said, “It's different if it's your child.”

Another audience member said, “I want to commend you for your courage.”