

How did you become a furry?

There's a few answers to this question.

The shortest answer is "I don't know", but since that doesn't satisfy anyone, a slightly longer answer is "One step at a time."

To elaborate and get into the real answer you all want, we've gotta go way back to my childhood interests. One major media which I was 'in' to during my younger years was Sonic The Hedgehog. It may be hard to imagine now, but at the time, Sonic and SEGA were considered at least semi-legitimate competition to Mario and Nintendo. Obviously we know how that turned out today, but underage me was enraptured. I never had a Genesis, but my first three digit purchase I made on my own (by which I mean entirely on my own, financially) was a Game Gear in the early 90s at my grandpa's Woolworth's store. It was a few months before I got a Sonic game, though.

Shortly after I got into the Sonic games, Sonic became a comic book at Archie as a tie-in to the upcoming TV show. There ended up being two, Adventures and SatAM, and the latter I would get up dutifully at 7AM every Saturday to watch during morning cartoons (to speak of things dating myself). The setting was dark, and the forced transformation aspect of roboticization was something I was...a little obsessed with. To be fair, this wasn't my first exposure to transformation, I'd seen people turned into turtles on TMNT, a mime on Garfield and Friends, Inspector Gadget being shrunk repeatedly, or characters petrified on various other shows, but they were all of interest to me in a very...strong way. I'd record various transformations on my VCR when I got the chance and would frame-advance them slowly to watch how the animation was done. Truth be told, my memory simply doesn't reach back that far in a coherent way, but I was DEFINITELY into transformation before I was 10.

Another major source of this interest that I found, especially after Sonic went off the air (7AM death slot) was books. The first exposure I had outside of Sonic media in books to TF was either in Goosebumps, or in a "Choose Your Own Adventure" book, more likely the latter as I never got deep into the 'core' Goosebumps series (although I did read many of the spinoff "Give Yourself Goosebumps!" series). I quickly went to devouring the school library's supply of CYOA books, and once I'd depleted that, started working on the local library where I was. It was another source of comfort, and I'd place both holds and interlibrary loans on CYOA books I wanted to read, (A nontrivial thing, as each successful hold or inter-library loan cost 35 cents to cover the cost of the mail!) loving to find all the endings, especially the transformation ones. (One of my treasured possessions is a copy of "You Are A Shark" by Edward Packard, signed by the author for me). This also incorporated into my play with friends, but I can't remember much other than 'it was present' that things would transform or be transformed. Shrunk, petrified, mutated, whatever.

During a trip to California in 1995 over Christmas Break, I went with my family on a whale-watching expedition, and saw dolphins for the first time, playing in the bow wake of the ship during our return to harbor. I was instantly in love with them, and they became yet another subject of my research, at least the sanitized grade school version of dolphins. This interest lasted until about...oh, mid 6th grade before fading, but keep this fact in mind for now.

In mid 1996, Animorphs started releasing. The first book featured a lizard and I didn't get it through Book Club at school, but the second was a cat, and I figured, "Eh, this seems to be cool, I'll try it." This was my, shall we say, 'wake up call' to that transformation was a SERIOUS interest of mine, and I was hooked. I got book 3, which started sparking an interest in raptors, and a friendly classmate reminded me again a few months later I might be interested in book 4, which featured Cassie turning into a dolphin on the cover; she wasn't aware I was already planning to buy it. I continued buying the books through book club up through the time they stopped giving me the brochures around 1999, and to this day have all books 1-37, and several of the offshoot books, on my shelf. (I dream to complete it one day, but I've read all the books at least). And I kept reading them in the various libraries after that. Eventually my growing interest in TF outpaced the release dates of the Animorph books!

So I went to another source of transformations. Having been familiar with Circe from a Boys Life adaptation of The Odyssey, I dove into Greek Myth and some of the stories therein. It wasn't long before I realized the stories I was finding in 'collections' were all naming one source. Metamorphoses, by "some Roman guy" named Ovid. So, going to my local library, I searched for Metamorphoses, and it was on-hand! A 7th grader reading Ovid is not a normal sight in most middle schools. I was ENGROSSED, and would even read during class instruction. And my teachers let me, mostly, because I was so far ahead of what they were teaching that they were probably just glad I was showing up for class.

Eventually, though, by the end of 7th grade, I'd depleted even mythology that I wanted to read. After a brief foray into Animorphs fanfiction, I realized there were problems with quality there. Not that all the stories were bad, but, well. Fanfiction. Gems are rare among rocks. So during the end of year, once I had all my stuff sorted out, I typed in "transformation" to a web search engine; likely Yahoo at the time; Google didn't exist yet. I was led to Transform.to, a website that still exists today in mostly the same form, and found the Transformation Story Archive. At the time the Anime Transformation Story Archive and Transformation Graphics Archive were both still up, though the TGA was taken down within a few months due to the extreme bandwidth costs placed on the server owner.

TSA was exactly what I was looking for, and fascinated me, though again, some stories were quality, some were not. Some

were rather more adult than I wanted, however, eventually after some digging, I found some that worked for me. I definitely had a lot of fun reading it, looking at art, and such. Eventually I wandered over to the "Universes" page, and found the "Winds of Change" universe. This FASCINATED me. Winds of Change can be succinctly described as "a furry comic book" and "A Teen Thing", a 100 page story of a person going through "the change", his pubescent change into an anthro velociraptor. This piece...spoke to me. And I kept trolling the TSA archive and other story universes for quite some time. I even mentioned my burgeoning interest to a friend of mine who was deep into mythology, but it never went anywhere. If I'm being entirely honest, I failed a class in HS by mucking about reading the WoC archives instead of doing the classwork (one of the few classes at the time that used computers constantly).

By this point I was in high school. Animorphs had wrapped a few months ago, I was starting to be more confident, at least a bit, and wanted to interact more as I had few RL friends; the friend I'd mentioned TF to had moved away. But...what to do as I unmasked? Everyone had these amazing avatars of sorts on the Trans-Forum and TFCentral, and I wanted to be beyond 'human'. I decided what I was going to do was find an animal I felt fit me to represent me on the forums. I spent a fair bit on this, and I don't remember all the animals that were involved. But what it ultimately came down to was velociraptor, bottlenose dolphin, and red-tailed hawk as finalists. Eventually I settled on the last of the three, named myself a forgettable handle I don't feel like sharing this publicly, and jumped onto TFCentral forums (at that time called TransForum Advanced, though it later changed to TFCentral since the TransForum was a different website and the creator of that pun was less than happy with it being reused). Now obviously by the name, this was focused more on transformation than on furry in general but from here I was exposed more to other types of transformation. Not just human to animal, but transgender, human to anthro, and anthro to anthro, amongst other things. While there were definite issues in the community now that I look back, it was a good incubation chamber for me to grow and develop in for a few years. The most important thing I learned here was that you can't have any 'sacred cows' in this fandom, and being a prude isn't great. Like, if you're not into something, that's fine, but someone else is, and they're not trying to offend you with it, in most cases they don't even think of you. I was very 'compartmentalized' initially as to what I considered appropriate TF content, but this had to give way to reality.

A few people I met there got me into IM clients. My first was ICQ, followed some weeks later by MSN Messenger. These were the Telegram and Discord of yesteryear, as was AOL Instant Messenger and Yahoo Instant Messenger, and I ended up with all of them. By this point I also had an email address at hotmail. I used these to communicate, and started to get in other forms of trouble by talking directly with people. I won't name most names here, but after some time I got a LiveJournal, and started to dive into IRC, a chatroom protocol. I met 'my people' on Avians.net IRC and had a lot of fun there and maintain friendships with some of the people I met. More critically, on TFNet, I met Lunarkeys in late 2005. And I also found a new outlet through roleplay for my creative efforts. I was also writing my own Winds of Change story during the latter years of high school, as well as some stories in other TF universes that have since faded from public memory. Few if any of them ever made it online; the writing quality was at best mediocre, as much teenage writing tends to be.

Somewhere along the line here I started taking a "Morphic", or anthro, form of a red-tailed hawk as my avatar in places, leading to a gift picture by Seacigar that remains my first avatar picture. I used this as an icon for several years. Eventually I tired of my unoriginal starter name, and decided to change my handle online. I'd heard that one of the trained birds used in the film "Ladyhawke" was named "Arrow", decided it was a good name, and adopted it. "Quivershaft" came later as a sort of surname built on an "archery" theme (Arrows, quivers, and shafts all exist as part of archery) after I got confused for another "Arrow" who was a sea eagle who was also a writer in the fandom.

In late 2004, I wanted to go to a furrycon, (MidWest FurFest) but my parents wouldn't let me. They were open to the idea, but my brother wanted to go deer hunting and at the time deer hunting weekend and MFF were the same, and my parents decided to support his endeavor instead. I suspect there was some subtle calculus there, in the idea that maybe I'd grow out of this and they'd never have to take me, while my brother would go deer hunting every year from then on. Amusingly enough, he never went deer hunting again, and I've been going to cons ever since. Funny how that worked. I did get to go the next year, for a day trip, followed by a one night stay in 2006 and a full weekend in 2007. My mom came with me the first year as an attendee, and continued to come to Chicago with me, although she no longer attended in subsequent years, just did shopping and tourism. She felt comfortable enough that I could 'handle' myself and could call her if I needed her, which I never did.

In 2004 I also joined an online D&D campaign and came up with Kawheek as a character; this reignited my love for telling stories like I'd done with LEGO when younger and writing from Writer's Workshop in elementary. Pursuant of this, I quickly found that RPing Kawheek one night a week was insufficient, and I found other places to play. Eventually I found a setting called Kaerwyn, run by Jakkal, through which I've made some good friends, as well as grown as a storyteller and player, as well as a writer. Many of my characters come originally from Kaerwyn or were influenced, one way or another, by events that precipitated from my time there. There was pain, it wasn't all roses, and I ended up taking a break for a few years when my college load shifted. But I returned and have been active there for over a decade now.

In early 2008, a friend, JayEnfield, did a massive cross-US excursion for tourism purposes, and stopped by my hometown partway through to see me. It took some finagling with my parents, but they let him stay for a few days and this was probably the point where they finally realized this was a large commitment of my time and energy, and that my judgement with friends was good. This paid off later that year when I floated the idea of going to Anthrocon, and they were very...hesitant...about me going to a strange city with no family nearby to help me if I got into trouble. But after a few weeks, JayEnfield asked me if I had a room and could room with me, and my parents significantly felt more comfortable allowing me to go. I'd flown on planes before, but never as a lone adult, so this was part of their concern. But it went off well, and Anthrocon 2008 was a blast. I've attended every year since, excepting COVID cancellations and 2022 where I couldn't get the time off. Ditto for MFF, excepting 2021.

Later that year when it came time to attend MFF 2008, I decided to host an Avians centric fandom panel, as none had been hosted there the prior year. I reached out to their Programming/Events department, and was put in touch with KP, who filled the Fandom Track role at that time. He was willing to grant me a panel, and I had a blast hosting it, enough so that when the time came for me to schedule Anthrocon the next year, I contacted him again, as he was Anthrocon's Programming Director, and asked to be put in touch with the Fandom Track Lead for Anthrocon. I got back a message that the position was currently vacant, and asked if I was interested in staffing the con. I accepted and became the new Fandom Track lead for ANthrocon, a position I held through 2022; I've been promoted out of it in 2023. During this time I added several panels I felt were important to become regular, particularly an "Under 18" panel for younger people, and "So Your Kid Dragged You To Anthrocon", a panel for parents-in-tow of the younger people at the Under 18 panel. After a few years I teamed up with Furscience to make the panel better, as they could provide numbers I couldn't. This has been, I feel, an important addition to the convention and I'll be hosting it as long as I can continue to get space for it.

Beyond this, Furry shaped a lot of my outlook in the world, breaking me out of my relatively conservative upbringing and letting me explore myself, and realize that a lot of the people I'd previously looked down on were no different than me and didn't deserve to be snubbed for living their lives