

Rebecca Sterlington Backstory

**** I'd like to include a note here about deadnaming. When I first wrote this profile I was not fully aware of the toxic impact of deadnaming. I specifically asked my client at the time about whether to name this character as Rebecca for her whole life or whether to name her by the name given to her at birth - and to gender her as such - up to the point where she realised that she was trans. I did as the client asked me to.*

Several weeks later when somebody drew my attention to the problem of deadnaming and misgendering I returned to the client about this. They asked me to leave the profile as it is.

*Since then, I have researched the impact of deadnaming so am now far more aware of how unhelpful it can be. I will handle my next trans character commission differently to ensure that I do not deadname or misgender them. ****

Species: Tiger shark

Sex: ♂ Male-to-female trans

Age: 24

Height: 4ft 6in

Weight: 130lbs

Appearance: Shorter but stockier than average with grey stripy skin on her dorsal side. Black hair shaved on the left hand side, with the front ends dyed purple. Crimson eyes. Size EE breasts

Clothing and accessories: Black-framed glasses, pierced nostrils on both sides and on both sides of lower lip

Siblings: Twin brother named Jeremy, who died in childbirth

Hobbies: Smoking, drinking, gaming

Rebecca is a tiger shark, and an original character. She was born as Robert, experienced a variety of abuse in childhood, and is on a slow path towards healing in the current day, during her time as a young adult.

Trust & Confidence

(newborn)

Rebecca was male at birth and one of a set of twins. However his brother, named Jeremy, and his mother, both died during birth.

Robert's father raised him alone, but did not cope well with solitary fatherhood. Robert's father coped with his grief and the responsibility of looking after an infant by drinking. This may have started at a relatively low-level and escalated over time, as Robert was cared for well enough to survive to adulthood.

Although Robert's physical needs were taken care of, his father was very reluctant to show affection towards Robert. This is surely due to the bereavements his father had experienced.

Robert lacked the capacity to understand what was wrong, except for the observation that his father was reluctant to interact with him. Robert came to feel that there was something deeply wrong with him that made his father unable – or almost unable – to tolerate him.

In other words, he lost his trust, mainly in himself.

Freedom & Self-Determination

(toddlerhood)

Robert's father found it difficult to seek help with raising his son for a number of reasons. One of these was his native reluctance to ask for help (after all, when in distress he numbed his emotions with alcohol. This is usually a poor indicator of ability to seek help). He also had little to draw on with regards to family. His family were all either dead or had a drug dependency.

He also received little to no help from his wife's family. They dissociated after her death and did not come forward to offer help. They may not even have responded even if Robert's father had asked for help due to their natural tendency to dissociate, which, as previously stated, he was unlikely to do.

Robert's father certainly needed help, including financial help. Throughout Robert's upbringing they remained poor. At times they lost power to the house, and it was not uncommon for them to go hungry. This happened often enough throughout Robert's childhood that his growth was stunted.

Robert, like all tiger shark children, developed a tendency to bite. Given his very young age he lacked the capacity to restrain himself from biting. His mobility, which came as a natural consequence of becoming a toddler, meant that he could explore his environment and chew anything that took his interest, and he often did. His exploratory chewing damaged items around the house.

His father did his best to be resilient to this and to raise Robert well, but as time went by he found himself becoming more and more tired, isolated, and frustrated.

Robert picked up on this and did his best to avoid asking his dad for anything. His father's lack of emotional availability to his son meant that Robert often didn't get the things that he needed but didn't ask for.

With all of this happening, Robert was a cooperative toddler. It felt like a safer, better option to him to be cooperative than to defy his father.

Ambition

(young childhood)

The oppressive atmosphere of his home had an effect on Robert's energy levels: they remained relatively muted, and he kept a low profile.

Robert's father registered Robert with school and took him there for the first couple of days, but after that he left it to Robert to take himself there. Robert quickly realised that

school was a more pleasant place to be than at home – warmer, with friendlier people and all sorts of things to do – and he took himself there religiously. His attendance, once he started going, was immaculate.

Despite Robert's father's poverty, the school ran a lunch programme for poor pupils so he still got to eat while there. That also helped him to enjoy his time there.

As Robert started going to school and got to know the teachers and other children, he began to develop new empathy skills, ones that fitted in with the new community in which he found himself. However, even here he experienced difficulties.

The school was aquatic, and as a tiger shark he was understood to be an apex predator. The other children feared him. This presented a strange conundrum to Robert. On the one hand, he didn't have to be afraid, so could afford to begin to explore what it meant to spend the day without fear. On the other hand, the other children feared him in much the same way as he feared his father, so in its own way, fear crept insidiously into the situation. The children were prepared to comply with Robert whenever he asked for anything, and were polite and deferential, and given Robert's age and inexperience he may have mistaken this for friendship, but of course it was not. Meanwhile his teachers noticed his stunted social skills and the challenge that his status as an apex predator presented, and did their best to help integrate him into class smoothly.

As a result of all this he became bubbly and friendly, and enjoyed his contact with the other children enough that he began to heal in some small way, although he still had much more healing to do.

These fledgeling attempts at friendship may have influenced his tendency to bite, as he didn't want to damage the goodwill the other children had with him by biting them, and that goodwill had a brittle, fearful quality that he may not have consciously noticed. He still chewed a lot, and tended to chew on toys to alleviate his need to chew without hurting the other children.

Despite all of this confusion about the meaning of friendship and the power he didn't realise he had, Robert liked to cooperate. He found something fascinating about being part of a team and working towards the same goal together, and it gave Robert a pleasant taster of what good relations could be like. He came to realise that every member of the team had something to contribute and that their contributions were important – not just for the sake of the goal, but because (as he understood very well himself) everybody liked to feel valued. It became an important point to him that everybody was valued the same. He also came to dislike seeing one individual profiting at the expense of another.

Like many cooperators, he dedicated himself to the group, to ensure that everybody else was happy before himself. This became a long-standing habit in which Robert would habitually put himself last.

Resisting biting was hard work, especially for a small child, but between his determination to avoid doing it for the benefit of getting to play with the other children, and the careful guidance of his teachers, he managed it. This meant that he was tired of resisting by the time he got home, so he bit more when he was at home. His father didn't like this any more than he ever had. Robert was growing too, and as he got bigger and stronger, so did his bites.

At around this time, Robert became aware of a message that kept coming up in his father's words. This is how Robert became aware that he had once had a twin brother, and that his name had been Jeremy. His father said now and again that he would have preferred Jeremy to have been the survivor and not Robert.

This may be because his father idealised Jeremy, who after all had never had the opportunity to disappoint him by chewing their possessions, although there is little doubt that he would have. It may also have been Robert's father's way of saying he missed Jeremy, and wished he was with the family. It didn't help that Robert looked like his mother so inadvertently reminded him of her, so his father resented Robert for this reason too.

By the time he turned 5 his chewing was starting to do more serious damage. his father tried to put a stop to this by force. Of course, he was much bigger than Robert was and won every time. He committed a range of abuse against Robert – physical, mental, emotional, and sexual, to intimidate him into withholding from biting.

Productivity

(older childhood)

Although school was a safe space for Robert, he continued to find it difficult to consistently avoid biting, and often did it absent-mindedly. he damaged many books, notepads, pens and pencils, and even items of clothing. Once again he compensated by being as sweet, bubbly, and friendly as he could but this often failed to fully repair the trust he had inadvertently damaged by damaging others' possessions in the first place.

He continued to see his relationships with the other children as friendship, although as time went on he became haunted by the feeling that it wasn't. He would not be able to articulate this for a long time, but the truth was that he intimidated them.

This left Robert with an underlying anxiety that he found difficult to shift. Unable to locate the real source of the problem (and perhaps also unwilling to, since his friendships were some of the few sweet things in his life and he didn't want to look too hard at them in case he saw the fallacy in them), he became a perfectionist. The details of a project became very important to him; he could lose himself in them, at least for a while, and fretting about whether he'd missed anything helped him to feel as if he was addressing the anxiety at the pit of his stomach.

One day, when Robert was 8, he fought back against his father for the first time. His father retaliated by beating him harder, and Robert took a week to recover, during which time he didn't go to school.

Child to Adult Transition

(adolescence)

When Robert was 12, he had to fend off his father again in a particularly savage attack. His dad stabbed him in the stomach in a drunken rage, and Robert in turn stabbed his dad in the thigh with a screwdriver and fled the house. He went to his neighbours, who took the initiative that led to Robert being placed in foster care.

Robert's father's injury proved fatal and he was found dead in their house.

Robert's foster parents cared for him as best they could, which may or may not have been perfect care, but they were very aware of, and sensitive to, the trauma Robert had been through.

Robert had been in the habit of staying up all night for a long time. His foster parents allowed this, so long as Robert's grades didn't suffer.

By this time Robert was very conscious of the damage this his biting could do – both to property and to others' trust in him and willingness to engage with him. He had also developed his capacity for rational thought, and along with it, the ability to choose to delay his gratification to chew, a few years previously. This meant that when he found himself living with other children in the foster home he was well-equipped to avoid chewing them or their possessions. Instead he chewed the collar of his tshirt a lot.

Robert had always loved music, and had a particular love of strings. As circumstance had it, he only got the opportunity to indulge this in school, using school property, so he made the most of it when he could. He enjoyed the guitar, bass guitar, piano, violin, cello, and drums. Overall she loved metal, especially the more emotive songs. He also enjoyed singing. Music had therapeutic value to him: he could express himself and lose himself in it, both of which helped him to process and escape the trauma of his past.

At around this time, Robert made the decision to transition from male to female. He had never felt comfortable with his body, and he hated the idea of becoming his dad. Becoming female seemed the obvious step, to him. As part of this, she changed to she/her pronouns and changed names to Rebecca.

As a teenager, Rebecca came to feel very self-conscious about her body and took to wearing baggy clothing she she could hide in. Years of food-poverty at home, broken up by periodic access to food at school, prompted her to gorge herself whenever food was available. As a result she put on weight once she started living at the foster home and could eat all she wanted. She put on weight as a result, and became self-conscious about that weight. She was proud of her breasts – she took a C cup by the time of her senior year – but the chub on her stomach made her too self-conscious to show them off.

Rebecca has never liked public speaking. In particular, if she feels as if people in the room are staring at her, she shuts down, which makes it difficult for her to perform. Performing musically however, is another matter. When Rebecca finds that she stops over-thinking (to the point that she likens it to going into a trance), and simply performs. However, she did not start performing music on a more organised or professional level until later in life.

Rebecca transferred schools, and this marked a change in her relationships with her classmates. Previously she had been in an aquatic school where her schoolmates had feared her due to her being an apex predator. He small size had done little to reduce their fear. When she transferred to a new school it was to a school less familiar with tiger sharks, so her new classmates lacked any fear of her.

They bullied her for being different to them.

Rebecca's biting continued, mainly as an outside-of-awareness habit, which got worse when she was nervous. Unfortunately, many of the other teenagers she went to school with had learned that being unpleasant to her made her withdraw from them, which in turn

meant that she didn't damage their property.

Despite her shark heritage, Rebecca always liked gentleness, and especially liked small birds and animals. They helped her to self-regulate and relax, which in turn helped her to reduce her biting.

It wasn't just small animals she liked. She also liked – and continues to like – predators whom she feels are misunderstood or unnecessarily vilified. Ball pythons are on that list of favoured predators.

As time went on and Rebecca started to find a sense of security thanks to her foster home, she started considering the rest of her life. She became more and more clearly aware of the true depth of the hardship she had endured, and wanted to heal from this. This would turn out to be a long process and perhaps would never be fully healed, but she certainly had the determination for it.

She also started to enjoy physical affection and became very tactile. Having grown up with a father who didn't speak much, and being very introverted by nature, Rebecca preferred, and continues to prefer, non-verbal shows of affection.

Closeness in Relationships

(young adulthood)

As Rebecca grew into an adult it became clear that she was talented at blending in. With this in mind, she loves to work, as activity, especially something as necessary as work, makes a handy alternative to spending time with people. Her investment in her career, however intentional or not it may have been, brings her great pride. She is a skilled welder.

She continues to have a stunted ability to form relationships with others, especially sexual partners. She feels barely able to kiss a partner, and it takes a great deal of encouragement for her to engage in sexual activity.

Passing on Responsibilities

(older adulthood)

Rebecca is at a relatively early stage in life so has not given any thought to her retirement. However, she enjoys being busy so believes she would get bored if she gave up work.

She does not, and is unlikely ever to, have children.

End of Life

(old age)

Rebecca does not fear death. By contrast, she feels a sense of reverence towards the process of life and death. She takes comfort in the idea that she was born from stardust, and that after her death her body will return to the cycle of matter and life.

Credits

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Based on theory by:

Erikson, E., (1951) 'Childhood and Society', W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. chapter 7.

Want to organise your updates and talk with me about integrating them into your character? Email me on thecharacterconsultancy@gmail.com and I will be happy to help you!

~Hayley, The Character Consultancy