

## TAMMY RUGGLES

*Guardian Angel*, 2015  
Silver gelatin print, 24 x 36 in



COURTESY: THE ARTIST

## ALYSON LIE

# Her Boyhood

## Realizing the Transgender Identity

**A** year before she was born, the man who would participate in her conception—a Navy veteran of fifteen years—was nearly killed in a car accident. He was given a medical discharge and sent home to his wife and two children: a daughter seven years old, and a son, ten. Father had been away at sea when the two older children were born, had learned of their births via telegram, and was only able to get to know them during short furloughs or from their mother's letters, including scrawled notes in pencil: *Hi, Daddy. Love you.*

This time around he would be there for the birth, was handed the swaddled bundle of neurons soon after the event. She appeared to be an ordinary boy, squirming and frowning as new life forms will, adjusting to the garish lights and loud noises on the outside. This child was unplanned—a mistake, an example, as her mother would tell her ten years later, of how the rhythm method didn't work. Mistake or no, father and newborn bonded immediately and became inseparable. Everywhere Daddy went, his little boy followed. Father took son on trips to town, to the grocery store, to the hardware store, tiny hand clutching father's finger, his pants leg. On Sunday mornings, father and son would dress in matching suits, overcoats, and caps and go to the Methodist church in town. They would play catch, fly kites, plant trees and flowers together in the acre-sized front lawn of their ranch home situated in the middle of subsistence farms three miles outside their little town.

In photos, the handsome family stand, mother behind the two older children, father beaming, hugging the chubby baby to his chest, first in a blanket, then sleepers, then little color-coordinated jumpsuits.

Though reportedly a happy child, she never seemed to lose the frown. In photos of her at ten months, two years, and on into toddlerhood, the scowl is ever present. In one photo the happy father stands alone, towering above a circle of five toddling cousins, all of them little girls in ruffled bloomers except for the boy, not interacting with the others, but sitting in his own little world, supremely pissed off about something. Then at three, a solo photo of her standing in a vacant lot, wearing gray flannel slacks and a wool sweater, her pinky fingers pulling the corners of her mouth into a false, defiant grin. She remembers when this photo was taken, the delirious feeling of rebellion and