

Phyllis Frye Grandmother of the Trans Community

By Cristan Williams

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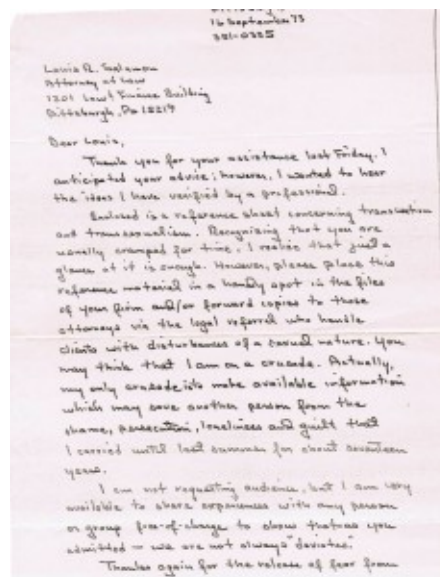
https://www.transadvocate.com/phyllis-frye-grandmother-of-the-trans-community_n_5542.htm

Abstract

Over the last 24 hours, I've spent about 12 of them scanning Phyllis Frye's 1970s trans documents. I don't know that I can even put into words how those documents affected me. Most of us don't know that we all owe Phyllis a debt of gratitude. 1973: Teaching transgender law before there was such a thing In [...]

Article

Over the last 24 hours, I've spent about 12 of them scanning Phyllis Frye's 1970s trans documents. I don't know that I can even put into words how those documents affected me. Most of us don't know that we all owe Phyllis a debt of gratitude.



1973: Teaching transgender law before there was such a thing

In Houston, we trace our community back to Phyllis. On the international scene, we trace our legal protections and back to Phyllis. Whether you want to talk about trans healthcare, national trans policy or the very notion of “community” - we can’t have that discussion about that without Phyllis.

Today we get really worked up if someone uses a word like “tranny” while endlessly debating whether the term “transgender” is a taxonomy or an identity. When Phyllis was creating what we would all come to benefit from, she was doing it in a world few of us would understand today.

Phyllis started the first inclusive trans group in Houston. Before she heard others use the term, she began to independently say “transgender” - in fact, she’s the earliest to cut through all the BS and just use the term “trans” to describe all who share a non-cis history, experience and/or expression... something we still do today.

DEAR

I'VE THE OPPORTUNITY TO LECTURE TO APPROXIMATELY 700 PSYCHOLOGY, PSYCHIATRY, AND SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ON THE SUBJECTS OF TRANSVESTISM AND TRANSGENDERISM ON THE FOLLOWING DATES:

UHH MAIN CAMPUS THURSDAY, 30 OCT } DR. MCGARY
8:30 AM
CHILD BUSTED

MONDAY, 31 OCT } VICKI KRAMMETT
8:00 AM
LIBRARY AUDITORIUM
(STANDING ROOM ONLY)

UHH DOWNTOWN CAMPUS: TUESDAY, 4 NOV }
11:30 AM (standing room only) }
Room 756 }
WEDNESDAY, 5 NOV } DR. SHERMAN
11:30 AM (standing room only) }
Room 756 (Houston) }
THURSDAY, 6 NOV }
5:00 PM }
Room 789 }
Houston

THE MAIN THREAT IS TO PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH THE INFORMATION TO HELP SOMEONE OR SOME COUPLE WHO MAY BE AS CONFUSED, DEPRESSED AND SUICIDAL AS I WAS 2 YEARS AGO AND TO WITNESS TO THE LOVE OF GOD AND SAVIOR GRACE OF JESUS CHRIST.

YOU AND/OR YOUR ASSOCIATES ARE ATTEND AS YOU DESIRE.

1975: “Transvestism and Transgenderism”

Phyllis was the one you wrote to if you lived in the South. Phyllis was cultivating the likes of Paul Walker even before he was a doctor. She helped Walker get the 2nd gender clinic in the nation up and going and in turn, Walker supported Phyllis’ trans groups.

THE JOHNS HOPKINS MEDICAL INSTITUTE
THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE • THE JOHNS HOPKINS HOSPITAL

DEPT. OF PSYCHIATRY AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE
Director of Psychiatry • Professor
Dr. Paul A. Walker
Chief of Service

August 27, 1975

Dr. Paul Frye
5501 Farnham
Houston, Texas 77036

Dear Dr. Frye,

Thank you for your letter and tape recording which I recently received. In listening to your tape and comparing it to my memory of the infamous "Lucky 13" incident and other I met two years ago, I was pleased to think how far you have advanced and progressed.

Should I hear of anyone in the Houston area interested in meeting you, I will let you know. I may be in the Houston/Southern area within the next several months. If my schedule permits, I may call you so that you can personally share with me your thoughts and attitudes.

I can't resist mentioning to you that I always advise patients to be very, very selective in how many people they allow into their personal lives. Reserve your privacy for yourself, and for your family and friends.

Take care.

Sincerely,
Paul A. Walker
Paul A. Walker, M.D. (Gen.)
Research Psychologist

PAW:js

1975 correspondence with Paul Walker

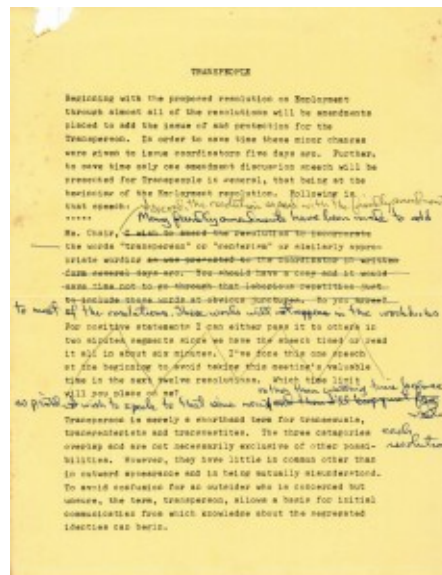
In the 1970s, she was OPENLY trans... doing radical things like leading queer marches.



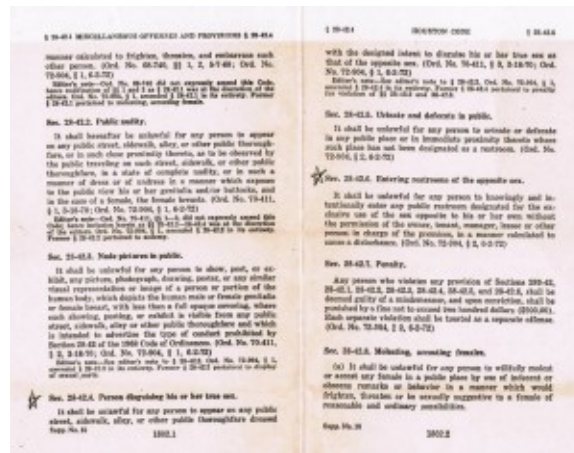
Phyllis marching and speaking for GLBT rights

While I know that it's a popular meme to pin the use of "transgender" on a number of people who are not Phyllis, but between the "trans" taxonomy she put into Walker's head, using the umbrella terms "transgenderism" and "trans" in her presentations at various universities and inventing a branch of national and international law called "transgender law," I think the time has come to acknowledge that without Phyllis, the "trans community" may not exist.

In the 1970s, Phyllis fought in a way that few but the most active of civil rights leaders could claim to have fought. She braved arrest every day she went out, she integrated trans folk into the National Origination of Women, she reached out to any politician who would listen - from the school board to the US President - and would do whatever it took to get an explicitly oppressive system to treat "trans people" (as she was calling us back in the 70s) with equality.

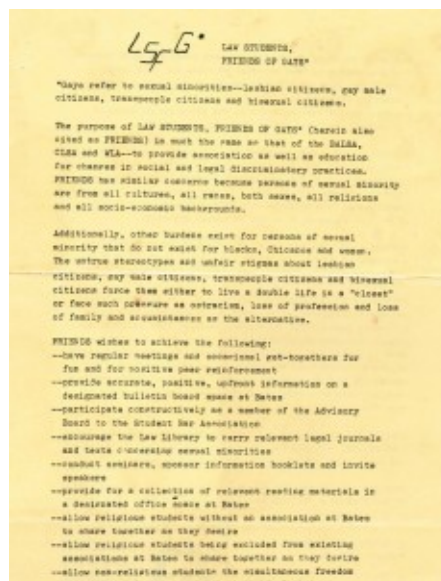


"Trans" - Explicit T umbrella term being part of a 'GLBT community' in its infancy. From speech at "Town Hall Meeting I"



Houston's anti-trans ordinances

Not only did she do “little” things like get Houston’s crossdressing ordinance overturned, she did other things like... ensure there was something that would come to be known as a “GLBT community.”



The trans-inclusive gay agenda by Phyllis

You know that “unity not uniformity” value that I’m always waxing on about that we in the Houston trans community seem to value so much? That’s all Phyllis. Language aside, she worked tirelessly to pull together a community. I’ve mentioned that Houston has something that’s called a “Unity Banquet” (now in its 20th year) and a “Unity Committee” and that these institutions are the foundations upon which a unified community was built. Well, we can thank Phyllis for that too. Decades ago, the mixed group and transsexual group was at war with the crossdressing group. Phyllis was the one who cultivated the ceasefire.

TRANS-PEOPLE is a weekly study group for transpeople:
transvestites, transgenderists, transsexuals
and for spouses or lovers, family, friends, neighbors
and other interested or concerned individuals

We meet each Monday evening, 7:30, @ M.C.C.R., 1214 Joe Annie.

TRANS-PEOPLE has five goals:
...to educate ourselves as to who and why we are
...to heal bruised emotions and broken hearts
...to counsel loving, interested and concerned outsiders
...to educate others that we are normal, functional people
...to share experience and fellowship

We have 3 enemies: ignorance
loneliness
stupidity

HOUSTON CODE MISCELLANEOUS OFFENSES AND PROVISIONS

Sec 28-42.4 PERSON DISGUIISING HIS OR HER TRUE SEX
It shall be unlawful for any person to appear on any
public street, sidewalk, alley, or other public thoroughfare
dressed with the designed intent to disguise his or her
true sex as that of the opposite sex.
(1.thoroughfare 2.designed intent to disguise 3.or her)

Sec 28-42.6 ENTERING RESTROOMS OF THE OPPOSITE SEX
It shall be unlawful for any person to knowingly and
intentionally enter any public restroom designated for the
exclusive use of the sex opposite to his or her own without
the permission of the owner, tenant, manager, lessee or other
person in charge of the premises, in a manner calculated to
cause a disturbance.
(1.designated 2.exclusive use 3.or her 4. permission
5. in a manner calculated to cause a disturbance)

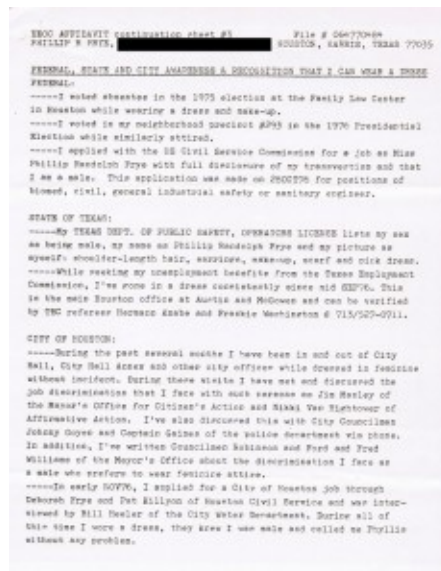
“Trans-People” - Support group for all trans people

Back in the 1970s, Phyllis was blacklisted. She wasn’t able to get work even though she was an experienced engineer. It is still heart wrenching to read the dozens upon dozens upon dozens of brush-off letters. When she tried to go back to school, she was turned down for practically any and all school funding. The State of Texas wanted to even refuse her unemployment. Schools turned her down and when she did get into school, she had to endure everything from right-wing Christian school groups coming to her home threatening to rape her wife (who stood by her through all of this) to the slashed tires, graffiti and threats from neighbors and anonymous haters.

activity produces so
much personal trouble
for you, can you
forego TV activity?

“If the trans...”

... not to mention the rejection from “friends” and family... including her own children. Going through these papers, I truly connected with the enormity of what she was facing... and overcoming... largely on her own.



EEOC Complaint

In the middle of all of this, she was being there for others day and night while building a foundation for a trans community. You name it she braved it. Remember; this was still the 1970s Houston where the KKK bombed our community radio off the air, they proudly marched down Montrose (the gayborhood) and our Mayoral candidates would say things like “shoot the queers.”

Thank you Phyllis!

cross-posted from Ehipassiko

Suggested citation

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