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Vision 2001: A Gender Odyssey — Part III

Regional & National Alliances and Political Organizations

by Dallas Denny

In addition to the seven major national organizations, a number of transgender groups and organizations exist on local, regional, and national levels. One or more groups can be found in most major cities and many smaller ones. These local groups do most of the front line work for the community, providing among other things telephone support, support group meetings, social functions, newsletters, peer counseling, and outreach services. Regional and national coalitions comprised of local groups serve coordinating functions and make possible projects which their member groups could not do alone.

REGIONAL ALLIANCES

The first and most prominent of the regional groups is MAGGIE (Mid-America Gender Group Information Exchange). Formed in 1981, MAGGIE consists of groups from a number of

Midwestern states (see map, p. 2). * Perhaps its most important accomplishment is the Be All You Can Be, an annual conference, now in its 14th year, which draws hundreds of crossdressers, transgenerists, and transsexual people from the United States, Canada, and Europe. The Be-All is held in late spring/early summer and travels from one sponsoring city to another. This year (1996) it was hosted by the Crossroads group of Detroit, 4-6 June.

The Be-All was the first gender conference to have equal appeal for all segments of the community, from crossdresser to post-op transsexual. Conferences like California Dreamin', Fall Harvest, the IFGE Coming Together, and Southern Comfort have all been more-or-less modeled on the Be-All. However, the Be-All itself has roots in Tri-Ess' gatherings, Outreach Institute's Fantasia Fair, and Esprit on the West Coast, all of which appeal primarily to crossdressers.

Other regional groups include the Greater New York

Gender Alliance, which hosts Moonlight in Manhattan; the Garden State Alliance; the Texas-centered South-Central Transgender Alliance Region (Star Connection); and the Magnolia Transgender Alliance, which is comprised of the Southern states, with the exception of Florida. The STAR, Garden State, and Magnolia Alliances have not undertaken large projects like conferences, but nonetheless form networks which allow for free exchange of information.

The Southeastern Regional Conference, which hosts the remarkable Southern Comfort convention, while not an actual consortium of support groups (it once was, but political conflicts brought it to its present form), is comprised of individuals from all across the Southeast, and serves

* This year saw the deaths of Jennifer Richards, one of MAGGIE's founders, from AIDS, and Gloria Fredricks, a member of the Nebraska/Iowa River City Gender Alliance (a MAGGIE affiliate) from a fall at her workplace. We offer our sympathy to MAGGIE and its member groups for their tragic loss.

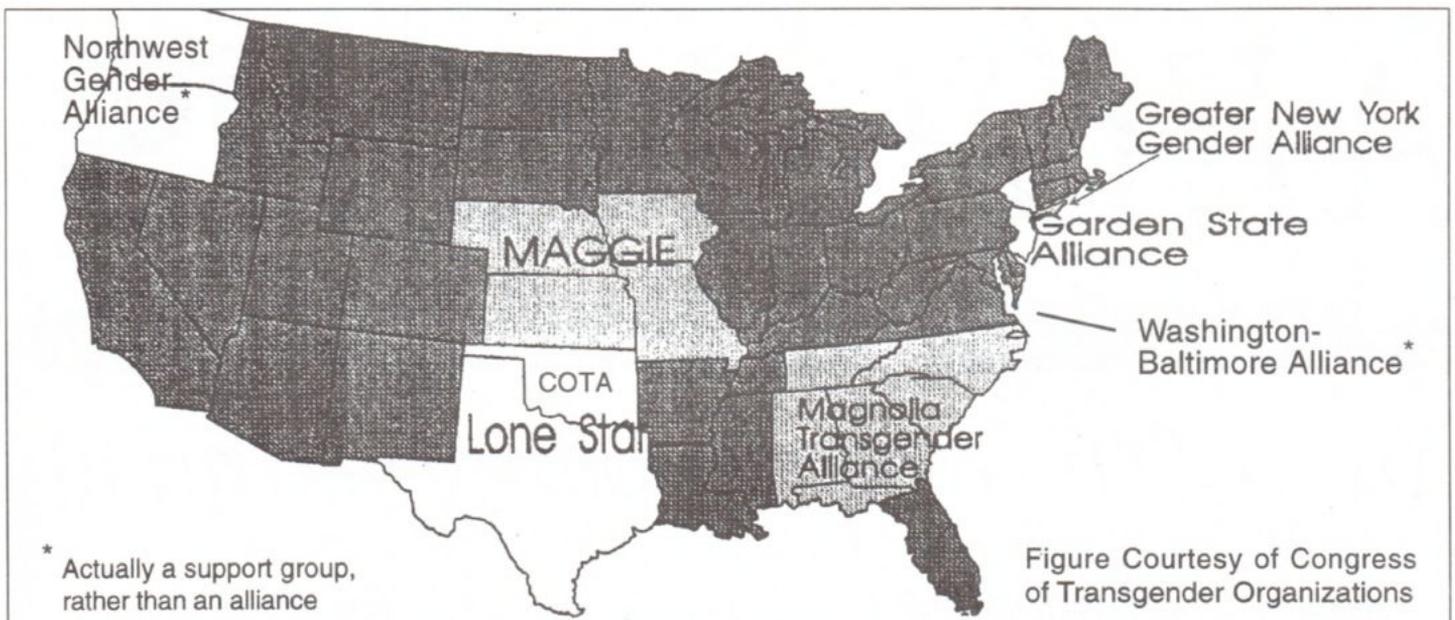


Figure Courtesy of Congress of Transgender Organizations

U.S. Regional Transgender Alliances

as a *de facto* regional group. Its primary function has been the hosting of Southern Comfort, but the Conference has considered doing outreach and other activities throughout the rest of the year.

What exactly do these regional groups do? Besides planning and holding conferences, they may pool their talents to: start a support group in a city without one; participate in Pride or other festivals; publish a common newsletter; work to influence legislation; or hold seminars or other educational meetings.

Perhaps the most important function of regional groups is that they can coordinate services, working to make sure that there is support for *every* person with a gender issue. An example of this is C.O.T.A., the Central Oklahoma Transgender Alliance. Tri-Ess deserves credit for helping its Oklahoma City Sigma Beta chapter build two new support groups: Sooner Belles, an open group which subsequently affiliated with Renaissance Educational Association; and Oklahoma New Men and Women for transsexual people, which became the first AEGIS affiliate. Thus, through one or more arms of C.O.T.A., FTM and MTF heterosexual and gay cross-dressers, transgenderists, and transsexual people all had a source for support. A common Board of Directors and a newsletter, *The Sooner Belle*, serves all

three groups, ensuring that lines of communication remain open.

Sigma Beta decided some months ago to disaffiliate with Tri-Ess, but C.O.T.A. still functions as its founders envisioned it: a coordinated family of services which serves anyone with a gender issue.

NATIONAL ALLIANCES

As in any community of people who share common interests yet disagree (sometimes emphatically) on important issues, it's essential that organizations and individuals be able to respect each others' opinions about matters which cannot be brought to a point of common agreement. There is, after all, much work to be done, and few resources. Squabbles over turf or membership can be vicious, to say the least. It's much better when money, volunteers, and energy can be pooled for a common purpose than used for fighting endless Bosnia-Herzegovina type battles.

Congress of Transgender Organizations (C.T.O.)

The Congress of Transgender Organizations (formerly called the Congress of Representatives) is an international body comprised of representatives from any transgender organization

which chooses to participate. Not only support groups, but national and international organizations like the Outreach Institute and FTM International are eligible to join. However, of the non-US based groups, only Phaedra Kelly's International Transgender Affinity has been active in the C.T.O. AEGIS votes for IGTA by proxy, at Phaedra's request.

The C.T.O. was conceived in the late 1980s by Alison Laing and JoAnn Roberts of Renaissance. The Congress was functionally a part of IFGE in the late '80s and early '90s, but declared its independence and took its present name in 1992. Since then, the C.T.O. has functioned as an autonomous organization, with the support of IFGE and other organizations.

The C.T.O. meets several times a year at one or the other of the many gender conferences held throughout the U.S. The main meeting is held in early spring at IFGE's annual convention. There, a slate of officers is elected and priorities set for the next year. *TransAction*, the newsletter of the Congress, is published several times a year. The figure at the top of this page is a modified version of a map in their June 1994 issue.

While the C.T.O. has undertaken a number of projects on its own, its most important function is to keep everyone talking. Thus, the Congress has been a catalyst in the formation of transgender support

Transgender Alliance for Community: The Pledge

Any organization which wishes to participate in the alliance should make the following pledge:

"We, the (name of organization), in the spirit of cooperation, caring and community, pledge to participate in the sharing of services, information, and resources, where possible with other transgender organizations in order to develop a true sense of community among all transgendered people of the world."

Transgender Alliance for Community

organizations. It has been and remains a place where all transgender organizations can work together to achieve consensus about important issues. Its potential is enormous, but still largely unrealized.

The Transgender Alliance For Community

The Transgender Alliance for Community exists to facilitate respectful interactions between gender organizations. The Alliance was developed by Alison Laing and JoAnn Roberts of Renaissance, myself, and Jane Ellen Fairfax of Tri-Ess. The original idea was advanced by JoAnn as a creative way to pool resources for a common display at the annual meeting of the National Association for Social Workers. Her idea quickly developed through e-mail, telephone calls, and in-person conversations. The alliance was a major point of conversation among JoAnn, Alison, and myself at the 1994 Fantasia Fair, and was formalized with a telephone call from JoAnn to Jane Ellen. The alliance was presented to the community shortly afterwards in *Renaissance News & Views*, Tri-Ess' *Femme Mirror*, and *AEGIS News*. The Alliance pledge (this page, top), can be taken by any transgender organization, and has been by many.

I'm not sure if there is a definitive list of organizations which have taken

the pledge, but certainly AEGIS, IFGE, Renaissance, Outreach Institute, and Tri-Ess have taken it and made good on the pledge by participating in and sharing expenses of booths at professional shows — something none of the organizations could have afforded alone. A brochure drawn up by JoAnn Roberts describes all of the participating organizations and has been given to convention attendees — thousands of them.

The Alliance has worked smoothly, despite differences in focus and protocol among the various organizations.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

GenderPac

After a rousing speech by Riki Anne Wilchins at the 1995 Be-All in Cincinnati, conference attendees spontaneously raised more than a thousand dollars for political action. The problem was — where and how would it be spent? Riki felt that Transsexual Menace, the direct political action group she co-founded, was not the best vehicle; nor did any other organization seem to be exactly appropriate (perhaps I.C.T.L.E.P., the Law Conference, came closest). And so GenderPac was born.

GPAC was formed spontaneously, by a consensus of the transgender community. Its goal is to fund political activi-

ties such as lobbying. A committee comprised of representatives from the national membership-based organizations makes decisions about funding political activities.

GPAC's major activity has been Transgender Lobby Day. Monies raised at Southern Comfort and other conventions were added to the Be-All money, and helped fund Lobby Day, the world's first mass lobbying effort for and by transgendered and transsexual people. More than 100 transpeople converged on Capitol Hill on the first Monday in October, 1995, and visited practically every Congressional office, shaking hands and talking with staffers and in some cases Senators and Representatives.

It's Time, America!

It's Time, America! (ITA) is a lobbying organization patterned after the gay rights group It's Time, Minnesota! Formed in 1994, ITA is dedicated to educating our elected representatives about transgender issues, controlling legislation which would be harmful to those in the community, and introducing legislation which would protect our rights. More than 20 states now have ITA chapters.

Political action takes time, money, and energy. As Jessica Xavier noted in *AEGIS News*, 4/96, it took years of effort by Jane Fee and others to get gen-

der expression included in an anti-discrimination bill in Minnesota. ITA has begun this slow march towards political change. It's Time Texas! and It's Time, Maryland! successfully managed to introduce bills in their respective state legislatures. Unfortunately, the ITM bills died in committee and the ITT bill made it out of committee too late to be voted on, but ITA's efforts have already begun to bear fruit—and on a tiny budget!

TOPS

TOPS is the acronym for Transgender Officers Protect and Serve, an organization which was formed in 1995 by Tonye Barreto-Neto, a Florida Deputy Sheriff, for transgendered and transsexual police and fire officers. TOPS was featured on ABC's 20/20 this spring.

TOPS' activities to date have been largely political. For instance, TOPS was a sponsor of the most recent Tyra Hunter protest, and Mr. Barreto-Neto was one of the transpeople who gave testimony in the Sean O'Neill case. Additionally, he visited the police department in the Nebraska town in which Brandon Teena was murdered.

TOPS is still in a growth phase. However, it has great potential for both political involvement and for providing direct support to policemen and firefighters.

Transsexual Menace

The Transsexual Menace (one s, please!) is a direct action group which is famous — infamous might be a better word — for its "in your face" attitude. The Menace's black t-shirts turn up everywhere, from Human Rights Campaign dinners to the Southern Comfort conference.

Unlike some other political organizations, the Menace's activities are done with tongue firmly in cheek. Protests are conducted in a "confront with love" manner. Materials and press releases use humor to drive their points home. The Menace has demonstrated about things as diverse as the re-release of Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual*

Empire; the trial of John Lotter (one of the murderers of Brandon Teena); HRC's exclusion of transpeople from ENDA; and the restrictive standards for trans competitors in the Gay Gaymes. Unfortunately, the Menace's work is marred by its habit of shooting from the hip without bothering to verify facts.

While some in the community look with distaste on any sort of direct political action, and especially at Transsexual Menace's in-your-face tactics, the Menace has been extremely influential at meeting its goal and in galvanizing the trans community into action; its track record cannot be easily dismissed.

Transgender Nation

Transgender Nation is a direct political action group which lacks the Menace's sense of humor. When TN San Francisco protested in August, 1994 outside the annual conference of the American Psychiatric Association (even as IFGE handed out brochures inside), some of the protesters were arrested for defacing the building with spray paint. TN Golden Gate has forcefully disrupted or taken over several conferences and meetings, sometimes on grounds which seem without substance to those who are less politically correct.

Transgender Nation, to its credit, has been more involved with the plight of transgendered and transsexual street persons and sex workers than have other political organizations in the U.S. Unfortunately, the West Coast chapters' angry rhetoric and a tactic of making demands without offering constructive solutions to the problems it is protesting have overshadowed other chapters and tended to make TN much less effective in affecting change than the Menace, with its wry sense of humor and well-thought-out actions, or ITA, with its carefully applied political pressure. In my opinion, while the anger shown by TNSF & TN Golden Gate is certainly legitimate, their actions have effectively crippled TN as a force for positive political or social change.

Nonetheless, TN does do some good work. Jessica Xavier, who is a member of TN Washington DC, informs me that TN San Francisco has been actively campaigning for various legal reforms in California.

The Loners

There are a number of individuals, including Dee Stallworth and Mecale Little in Philadelphia and Chelsea Goodwin in New York City, who work hands-on with transgendered sex workers and street people. This work is difficult and heartbreaking, and they do not receive the honor and recognition they deserve for doing it. Others, like Kiki Whitlock in San Francisco and Margaret O'Hartigan in Portland work to achieve political change from outside the transgender community.

With good justification, some of these individuals have blamed the transgender community for not caring about their clients or respecting their work. However, those who have complained the loudest have made little effort, other than staging some spectacularly grim protests, to educate the community about what they are doing. Those, like Dee Stallworth, who have reached out to the transgender community, have found the community receptive to and enthusiastic about their work.

GPAC or TS Menace?

When, in preparing this newsletter, I phoned Riki Anne Wilchins, GPAC's Director, to ask her about GPAC's activities, she listed the following:

A demonstration at Fall City, Nebraska, site of the trial of John Lotter, who was convicted of the murder of Brandon Teena, a transsexual man, in what was clearly a hate crime.

A presence at Colorado Springs, CO, home of the Christian Coalition, where Sean O'Neill faced a long-term prison sentence for what was technically statutory rape, but what were in actuality charges brought against him because of his failure to disclose his transgender status to his girlfriends.

Protests about the murders of transpersons Chanel Pickett in Boston; Deborah Forte in Haveril, MA; and Christian Paige in Chicago.

Ms. Wilchins said GPAC's goal is to have a demonstration any time a transper-

(Continued on Page 6)

The Menace Pulls a Fast One

During Transgender Lobby Day (which was actually a two-day event), a Transexual Menace-sponsored protest was staged outside the Washington D.C. city hall, making clear the community's dissatisfaction with the city's action—or rather, lack of it—in the Tyra Hunter case. [Hunter, as noted in *AEGIS News*, 11/95, was grievously injured in an automobile accident in August, 1995, and lay dying on the sidewalk when a fireman who had been treating her stopped and stood around

making jokes with other firefighters because he had discovered that she had male genitals; she subsequently died.]

This is remarkable; in the past, there have been no outcries when transpeople were killed or mistreated. Police and other government officials have acted with impunity, with no fear of sanction. Clearly, in this instance, in which the D.C. Fire Department did not want to admit any impropriety due to a lawsuit by Hunter's mother, the Menace's protest was significant.

However, the more important long-term work was done by GLOV, a consortium of G/L/B/T and hetero groups. GLOV obtained the name of the firefighter who had stopped treating her by invoking the Freedom of Information Act. The investigation was reopened on 12/4/95, just three days after a meeting of GLOV representatives with DC Mayor Otis Latin.

On the day after the 1/19/96 airing of a 20/20 segment on transgender activism, a Menace press release appeared, proclaiming the reopening of the investigation. However, the reopening occurred weeks *after* the 10/3/95 Menace protest and weeks *before* the 20/20 segment. The release was a masterpiece of misdirection, timed to create the impression that the Menace's protest and the Menace-orchestrated 20/20 coverage were responsible for the reopening. Actually, it was GLOV's lower profile work which turned the rusty wheels of government.

Tyra Hunter Timetable

8/7/96	Tyra Hunter dies
10/3/95	Transexual Menace protest
12/1/95	GLOV meets with Chief Latin
12/4/95	Chief Latin reopens investigation
1/19/96	20/20 transactivism segment airs
1/20/96	Menace press release proclaims reopening of investigation

Alliances

Congress of Transgender Organizations
GenderPac
c/o Lynn Walker
P.O. Box 090248
Brooklyn, NY 11209
718-836-6215

Greater New York Gender Alliance
212-765-3561

Magnolia Alliance
P.O. Box 18332
Asheville, NC 28814
704-253-9882

MAGGIE
St. Louis Gender Foundation
P.O. Box 9433
St. Louis, MO 63117

South-Central Transgender Alliance (STAR)
c/o Boulton & Park Society
P.O. Box 17
Bulverde, TX 78163
512-545-3668

Southeastern Conference (Southern Comfort)
P.O. Box 77591
Atlanta, GA 30357
404-633-6470
phillida@mindspring.com
<http://www.mindspring.com/~phillida/pchintro.sctop.html>

Political Organizations

GenderPac
c/o Lynn Walker
P.O. Box 090248
Brooklyn, NY 11209
718-836-6215

It's Time, America!
c/o Jessica Xavier
2710 Emmet Road
Silver Spring, MD 20902-4632
301-949-6049

Transgender Officers Protect & Serve (T.O.P.S.)
14962 Bear Valley Road, Ste. G-129
Victorville, CA 92392
topsspeak@aol.com

Transexual Menace
274 W. 11th St., Apt. 4R
New York, NY 1753
212-645-1753
riki@pipeline.com

Transgender Nation — San Francisco
504 Castro, Box 288
San Francisco, CA 94114-2588
415-863-6717

Transgender Nation — Washington, DC
P.O. Box 65
Kensington, MD 20895
301-949-3822 (then press option 8)
TheXgrrrl@aol.com

son is killed as the result of a hate crime. However, this would seem to be a goal of Transexual Menace rather than GPAC, as GPAC's focus is on lobbying.

The presence of transgendered men and women (whether because of the Menace or GPAC) made a significant difference in Sean O'Neill's trial, where the testimony of James Green of FTM International and Tony Barreto-Neto of TOPS educated what was essentially an ignorant court about trans issues. While efforts were not successful in freeing O'Neill, they did a great deal to ensure that his sentence was not overly severe — which it almost certainly would have been without their testimony, as the prosecutor, in this city which is home territory for the radical Christian right, wished to make an "example" of him.

Ms. Wilchins also gave the following examples of GPAC activities.

Michelle Martin was successful in persuading American Airlines to change their Equal Employment Opportunity statement to include transpeople.

In conjunction with the G&L Anti-Violence Project, a national tracking group, GPAC has launched the first national study of violence against transpeople conducted by transpeople.

Dana Priesing is lobbying on Capital Hill, working on, among other things, trans inclusion in ENDA and the Hate Crimes Statistics Act.

Jess Bell is conducting the first U.S. study about transpeople in the welfare and shelter system.

JoAnne Roberts, a member of the GPAC steering committee, said in a telephone interview that Dana Priesing's lobbying is a legitimate GPAC activity. GPAC exists as a funding organization, and to date, has funded only Transgender Lobby Days and Dana Priesing's lobbying activities. The other activities, while perhaps catalyzed by GPAC, have received no GPAC funding.

The Phyllis & Riki Show

Any discussion of political action in the transgender community would be incomplete without a discussion of Texas transgenderist and attorney Phyllis

Randolph Frye. Frye burst upon the national scene in the early 1990s, but was a one-woman trans liberation force in her native Texas for more than a decade before that. Her threat to disrupt the 1993 Stonewall 25 march brought transgender and transsexual issues to the forefront of the collection attention of the gay/lesbian/bi community. She and Riki Anne Wilchins played a well-reported game of "bad cop/crazy cop" while Jessica Xavier worked quietly as the "good cop" within the Stonewall 25 organization. When the dust settled, they had not succeeded in getting the word transgendered included in the name of the march, but there were transgender-positive statements in the march's demands, and transgender inclusion had become a overnight cause célèbre in the g/l/b community.

Deep Cunt's Analysis

I asked a post-op transsexual woman for her analysis of the transgender political structure. She requested that her identify be kept secret. "Call me Deep Cunt," she said. "Take that, Woodward and Bernstein." She wrote:

Surely, the rapid rise of political consciousness in the community means that things will never again be the same, Pandora. We can never go back into our comfortable little boxes again — not as a community, anyway.

Of the different organizations, she said:

Considering the rapidity with which the need for political action arises, and the amount of cross-talk between members of the various transgender organizations, it's not surprising that it sometimes becomes impossible to tell which organization(s) is/are sponsoring a particular event. When is an event a Menace action? When is TOPS a sponsor? When is it a GenderPac or ITA! or Transgender Nation event? And most importantly, is it all part of a plot to get Riki Anne Wilchins' name in the national press? (That's a joke, I say, that's a joke, son). It's only inevitable that a phase of our movement which is so new will be characterized by confusion. Eventually, the black t-shirts will have done their job,

and we will be taken seriously, as are gay and lesbian Americans, who after decades of being laughed at as queer, are suddenly very much a force in the American political arena. Soon enough, it will be time to get down to the much harder work of changing the system from within, rather than from without. ITA and GPAC are the two organizations which have the potential to do this.

Of those working outside the transgender community, Deep Cunt lamented:

This group of individuals must not be discounted. They do excellent work, often at great sacrifice — work no one else is willing to do, and they are paid nothing, or at best very little for it. Most of them are justifiably angry at the way they have been treated by the system. But those who don't expect understanding or support from the greater transgender community and so don't ask for it shouldn't be surprised when they don't get it. And frankly, Mary, I think some of them quite enjoy their outré status. As Joan Rivers might say, "Oh, grow up!"

Deep Cunt also spoke of the inevitable clashing of egos in the transgender political arena:

At transgender lobby day, there was a clash between the titans (or at least among those who are legends in their own minds): Riki Anne Wilchins and Phyllis Frye were very much engaged in a struggle to see who was calling the shots. It wasn't readily apparent to the troops, but many of us at Starfleet Command were aware of what was going on. Fortunately, Lobby Day is bigger than any of us and all of us; it's a happening. Phyllis and Riki Anne are like TransAbbott and TransCostello; they play off of each other very well, whether they realize it or not. Phyllis is an excellent speaker in her own right, but Riki Anne, on her better days, can capture hearts and minds as only the truly insane can. Phyllis, with years of hard work, was a major force in getting the transgender political ball rolling, but cannot push it all by herself. Riki has made it clear that she is willing to stir up the hornet's nests, but has no intention of hanging around to deal with a bunch of

stirred-up hornets. The community needs someone like Riki who can inspire strong emotion, but it also needs someone like Phyllis, who is in it for the long haul. And let's not forget that most of the real work is done by people like Jessie Xavier, Sharon Stuart, and others whose personal styles don't tend to get their names in headlines like the more flamboyant Phyllis and Riki.

CONCLUSION

Regional and national alliances of transgender organizations facilitate communication and make possible goals which could not otherwise be achieved. Alliances require the setting aside of egos and personal agendas, and so are relatively difficult to form and maintain in any situation. The fact that the alliances of the transgender community are relatively stable and free of conflict is remarkable. The alliances are one of the community's greatest assets.

The political organizations are remarkable also in the way they work together for common purposes. Activists spend an enormous amount of time and often their private funds, riding herd on discrimination, for no pay and little glory (I think they just want a chance to give a tip of the hat and a hearty, "Hi, Yo, Silver!" and ride off into the sunset). They work in the face of apathy and even hostility from many in the community. The political groups are on the cutting edge of the transgender movement, and so are not uncontroversial, but their gains are clearly measurable. Measurable is hardly the word: they have made *enormous* strides.

One thing that is *not* working is the very thing that gets protested frequently: the transgender community pays little attention to its most vulnerable and most needy factions: trans youth, those forced by poverty born of discrimination into sex work, persons of color, and those who are HIV-positive. The ongoing protests about these issues provide a clear message that more needs to be done. Obviously, the national organizations could do more for the disenfranchised — and AEGIS *is* committed to doing more. But someone, somewhere, is going to have to start an organization which address issues of homelessness, prostitution, drug abuse, street violence, and HIV as its *major focus*. It won't be those whose dance cards are already filled. Perhaps that someone will be *you*. —*AX*

To The Editor

I found Jessica Xavier's article "So You Wanna Be In Politics" in *AEGIS News* #7 (April, 1996) to be an excellent and realistic view of where our community has been, where it is now and where it's going, politically speaking. However, Ms. Xavier misses her mark in two places and I'd like to clarify those for your readers.

On page 6, near the bottom of paragraph 2 Ms. Xavier says, "Existing rivalries amongst the Big Seven... have led to competition for what little money there is within the transgender community." I have served on the boards of three of these so-called Big Seven organizations and there is no "competition" nor "rivalry" for money. Each organization serves a segment of the community with its own set of services. Certainly, some people belong to more than one organization. And, it was precisely these organizations that decided to form the Transgender Alliance for Community (TAC) to pool resources for major outreach activities. This was an historic milestone in bringing the community's organizations closer to a united front.

I didn't understand her view of these organizations until I read paragraph 5 on the same page in which Ms. Xavier downplays GenderPAC (indeed does not even explain what GenderPAC is) and states that full-time political lobbying by a group such as It's Time America! is what our community really needs. I agree that full-time lobbying is needed, but I don't feel that It's Time America! is the organization to do it.

GenderPAC was created at the 1995 Be-All by the TAC partners, i.e., AEGIS, IFGE, Outreach, Renaissance and Tri-Ess, because there was no viable mechanism for raising money to do political lobbying. The GenderPAC steering committee was expanded shortly after the Be All to include ICTLEP, FTM International, TOPS, ITA! and other organizations.

As Ms. Xavier well knows, the leadership of many of our community's organizations are disenchanting and disenfranchising with It's Time America! When ITA! was announced in 1994 there was much thundering fanfare about this new political lobbying organization. But, as Thomas Edison once said, "Thunder is good. Thunder is impressive. But, it's lightning that does the work."

Ms. Xavier and I had several conversations about creating statewide ITA! chapters, specifically one in Pennsylvania. I asked for copies of the organizing documents of ITA!. I asked for an ITA! plan to educate the grass-root community about how to go about lobbying on the local level. I had an eerie sense of *déjà vu* as none of these documents materialized. Those who have been around the community for more than a few years will recall similar fanfare about an organization calling itself the Gender Activist League

(GAL) coming out of California in 1991. GAL's objective was the same as ITA!'s, political lobbying. GAL does not exist any more than ITA! exists.

That was the problem which faced the organizational representatives in June of 1995 at the Be All convention. ITA! was not a legal organization. It had no firm basis for actually performing its stated objective. Another issue discussed was: did the community need yet another organization which would attempt to raise money from a relatively small (compared to the G/L/B community) base of contributors.

Federal law permits 501(c)(3) organizations to spend up to 20% of their gross income (with a limit of \$1 million) on specific lobbying activities.

By having pre-existing tax-exempt organizations create GenderPAC, they cut through the organizational BS of yet another bureaucratic hierarchy and GenderPAC enjoys immediate tax-exempt status under the umbrella of the organizations that created it. And, by pooling the gross revenues of *all* the organizations involved, GenderPAC can spend upwards of \$100,000 per year without penalty. (Believe me, it will be a long time before we raise more than \$100,000 per year for lobbying.) Perhaps most importantly, since GenderPAC was created by the national membership organizations, IFGE, Tri-Ess, Renaissance and AEGIS, it implicitly has the support of those organizations' members. The mailing lists alone come to over 10,000 names.

The Transgender Lobby Days was just one of those specific lobbying activities allowed under GenderPAC limitations and the member organizations, along with help from individuals, raised over \$10,000 in just 90 days. Since then, GenderPAC has been fortunate to secure the services of Dana Priesing as its official lobbyist in Washington, D.C. Ms. Priesing is out and well-known in the halls of Congress as a transgendered attorney. At the moment, Ms. Priesing is working on a volunteer basis, but GenderPAC is working to provide her with more substantial financial support.

In short, while ITA! continues to talk about what needs to be done, GenderPAC is doing it. While ITA! is thinking about combining with ICTLEP, GenderPAC is raising money for lobbying on a full-time basis.

I urge everyone who believes this community has a political future of its own to make a contribution to GenderPAC through one of the "Big Seven" organizations. These contributions are tax-deductible on your personal income tax under the limitations provided by federal law. It doesn't matter if it's \$5000 or \$5. Every bit helps.

JoAnn Roberts
Co-founder, GenderPAC
Member of the Steering Committee

(See page 8 for Ms. Xavier's reply)

Jessica Xavier's Reply

To Joann Roberts' Letter (p. 7)

The mere existence of the Big Seven national organizations with similar or overlapping memberships and missions creates an active, *de facto* competition for funding, whether or not this competition is overt. There is just so much money in our community to go around, and how and where we spend our money is the single most important indication of where our values are, either personally or as a community.

The main issue underlying JoAnn's comments is one of representation, not action. Questioning whether a group's representation of its community is valid is one of the oldest undermining tactics around — even the Human Rights Campaign used it against our so-called "Magnificent Seven" Coalition of activist leaders last year. These arguments can get very messy, but since she has opened this can of worms, I feel I must respond.

It's Time, America!'s lobbying efforts began in 1994 with our initial efforts to get transgendered persons included in ENDA. A year of lobbying work by ITA's Karen Kerin and Jane Fee, with help from Phyllis Frye, succeeded in readying a transgender-inclusive version of ENDA for congressional consideration. In June, 1995 our version was rudely discarded by the Human Rights Campaign, galvanizing the national political community to take collective action. By then It's Time, America! chapters in Maryland and Texas had already organized themselves and in a short period of time, went on to introduce three pieces of legislation at the state level while simultaneously engaging their local state gay and lesbian lobbying organizations in discussions regarding our inclusion and joint cooperative efforts.

ITA chapters exist for the sole purpose of political action, but the Big Seven groups were formed for other reasons. People join and contribute to ITA chapters for purely political reasons. But if someone joins AEGIS, FTM International, IFGE, Outreach Institute, Tri-Ess or Renaissance, they may be joining those membership organizations to support gender education or to have a place to go for meetings. To say that GenderPAC enjoys the "implicit" support of all 10,000 members of its participating groups for its political mission is an overstatement.

When I wrote my essay this past winter, GenderPAC was a non-entity in Washington. Apart from its co-sponsorship of Transgender Lobby Days (with It's Time, America!, ICTLEP and The

Transsexual Menace) GenderPAC has done nothing with its funding base until the lobbying efforts of Dana Priesing began this past spring. And most recently, those lobbying efforts have become shrouded in controversy. It is the present and future effectiveness of GenderPAC that remains to be proven, not ITA's.

JoAnn has told me before that some of the leadership of our community's national organizations has been disenchanting with It's Time, America! due to their lack of input. Point taken. Perhaps she is unaware of the equal disenchantment and disenfranchisement that many community activists felt and still feel towards the Big Seven national organizations. To cite a few personal examples, I was present during an Executive Committee Meeting for the 1993 March On Washington, when I saw an IFGE leader take no position on transgender inclusion while the issue was being hotly debated. With the exception of ICTLEP, I was equally disappointed in the lack of interest of the other national organizations over our exclusion from Stonewall 25. And I was not alone.

Fairly or unfairly, there has long been a perception that the Big Seven cared more for their conventions and catering to the needs of the upper 5% of our community, the economic elite who attended them, rather than the issues and concerns of many of us, especially our own minorities: gay, lesbian and bisexual transgendered persons; FTMs; transgendered people of color; transgendered People Living With AIDS; those physically challenged, etc. Fortunately, our community has come a long way in the two short years since ITA was founded in 1994. Leadership and organizational changes such as the Transgender Alliance for Community have contributed to a nationally organized community that is now at least considering the needs of all members of our community. Finally!

But that was not the situation when we founded ITA in 1994. It was our intent that unlike the Big Seven, ITA and its chapters would become grass roots membership organizations, reaching out to all members of our community and giving them a voice. But as JoAnn points out, even thunder needs lightning to do the work. Shortly after ITA began, we were in the process of making overtures to the national organizations and leaders (including JoAnn) when ITA became crippled by a series of disagreements amongst its leadership over the future direction of the organization, which stopped the preparation of its bylaws, plans for membership structure, etc. Not that anyone knew it, but by the time GenderPAC was formed at the '95 Be All, ITA had already been incorporated and did indeed exist as a legal organization

(albeit without completed bylaws). Our leadership problems, more than any other factor, prevented us from moving forward with our mission and goals. I got over my disappointment (and embarrassment!) by re-focusing my efforts on It's Time, Maryland!, and we managed to achieve some modest results here in the Free State.

Today the state chapters that are forming and growing to carry the work of ITA forward are succeeding in their grass roots organizing efforts. More than ever, ITA is its state chapters, and we are becoming truly representative of our local communities. It's Time, Maryland! has over forty members, men and women, transgendered and non-, straight and gay, white and black, young and old. As a feminist, I still believe that the key to the future success of our movement lies in bringing everyone into our groups and giving them a voice by using consensus-based decision making.

ITA is undergoing significant changes as I write this, thanks to the strong leadership of Sarah DePalma, and I feel the community may expect a lot more from ITA in the future. Moreover, ITA's bottom to top, small is beautiful approach, with our focus on winning small, precedent-setting victories at the local and state levels first, may be more successful over the long term than attempting to effect changes at the national level immediately. ITA's new motto, "thinking globally while acting locally" is becoming our reality.

Questioning whose right it is to represent whom can only lead to further divisions and perpetuate intergroup rivalries. As I said in my essay, we all have had enough of that! JoAnn is absolutely correct in pointing out the advantages of pooling our limited resources, and noting that an existing community financial structure exists at the national level. Therefore, in light of current realities, given a political climate where the need for unity becomes paramount, and in the best interests of our community, I will agree with her. The largest community organizations should be expected to represent the community before the Congress through GenderPAC. Given the interests and personalities involved, the possibility exists for a natural division of labors, with ITA's grass roots efforts at the state and local levels and GenderPAC's work at the national level. ITA's Board intends to explore this with GenderPAC's Board with the hopes that we may be able to form a unified political front similar to the Transgender Alliance for Community's joint educational and outreach efforts. My thanks to JoAnn for moving these aspirations forward by responding to my article and engaging in this dialogue. -AΛ

Is There a Price for Political Activism?

The transgender and transsexual community tends to fractionate along lines of opinions about political activism: is it a good thing, or a bad thing? Not surprisingly, some of those most opposed tend to characterize activists as ego-driven, sensationalizing dunderheads and even to claim that activists' efforts have set us back rather than moving us forward. Equally unsurprising, some activists show little understanding of or concern for those who wish to keep their identities secret.

The issue tends to be painted in black-and-white terms, but of course, it isn't so simple in real life. It's incontrovertible that transgendered and transsexual people have experienced a quantum leap in acceptability which was coincident with the rise of transactivism — but it's equally incontrovertible that activists have pissed a large number of people off. It is true that greater visibility in the media makes people more sophisticated at "clocking" even well-passing transpeople by their physical characteristics, but it's also true that most of us get read on occasion, and that media visibility has made it less dangerous for us when we do get clocked.

In the early '50s and '60s, few people permanently crossed the gender line, and only those who were passable were able to do so without receiving unwanted attention from the media and the local bigots. In this postmodern age, it has become relatively easy to gain access to the medical technologies which change appearance, and tens of thousands of people all over the world have undergone sex reassignment. In fact, the actual phrase — sex reassignment — does not adequately describe the wide range of options for people

who transgress gender in the '90s. A consumer sensibility has arisen. Transpeople are picking and choosing body parts and medical procedures much as they would choose an extended cab, heavy-duty bumpers, and air conditioning for a new pickup truck. This one crosslives full-time, but without surgery; this one has had SRS, but still lives in the originally assigned gender; this one has had breast implants but has not otherwise modified her body; this one wears dresses but doesn't even shave the body; this one is so butch everyone thinks she is male, but she identifies as a woman; this one blends male and female characteristics as if from a palate, achieving a deliberately androgynous appearance. Those who totally disappear into their new gender roles are outnumbered by those who maintain ties to their old lives, and yet total disappearance is still a valid option. In fact, every choice one can make has its benefits and disadvantages, and that includes both remaining in the original gender and disappearing into the woodwork after transition with the intention of never being seen again.

So in this diverse group, who stands to gain from political activism? Who stands to lose?

The voices most frequently raised against political action come from those who have chosen to assimilate, or who have hopes of one day doing so. They fear, and with some justification, that backlash against the transgender political movement will result in people becoming less tolerant rather than more, and that this will not bode well for them if they are discovered. Of course, a few decades ago, before there were organizations dedicated to providing education about transsexualism, before the television talk shows, before the protests, they would have faced the danger of being arrested and/or named in the media if they were revealed;

nowadays, there is little risk of widespread public exposure if they are found out. So my questions to them are: Why stop now? Do you think there has been *just* enough education about transsexual and transgender issues, and any more would be harmful? Or do you believe things were better in the '50s and '60s, when you would have made national headlines if you had been discovered?

But I have questions for the activists, as well. This spring, Transsexual Menace demonstrated outside the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, demanding that Gender Identity Disorder be removed from the DSM-IV. Phyllis Frye has had some success in having born-male persons who have not had SRS declared legally female. So my questions are: Is the benefit of removing GID from the DSM worth the suffering it will cause those who might otherwise have had part or all of the costs of transition paid by insurance? Is it moral to negatively impact insurance coverage of your brothers and sisters? Will achieving legal status of persons with penises as women deligitimize the female status of those who have had genital surgery? Is there a price for political activism? And if so, are you willing to achieve your political goals on the backs of other transpeople?

I'm sure questions such as this were raised by Blacks and by gay men and lesbians during the early days of the civil rights and gay rights movements. Ultimately, as the *zeitgeist* changed as the results of those movements, the actions of even the most radical had a beneficial effect on even the most conservative. I believe the same thing will happen as the result of transactivism — has already happened, has caused a sea change in the way we are perceived and treated in American society. But there are no sure things in life. —AΛ

First PFLAG Support Group Forms for Families of Transgendered Persons

by Sharon Stuart

Reprinted from the PFLAG Newsletter

What does it mean to be transgendered? In theory, transgendered people are those who manifest characteristics, behaviors, and modes of self-expression which are typically associated with members of the opposite sex and/or gender.

But what does it *mean* to be transgendered? And what can PFLAG do to help our society understand about transgendered people and their families and friends?

Ellie Altman sought the answer to these questions, and decided to take charge of PFLAG's efforts to reach out to family members and friends of transgendered people. The mother of a 30-year-old female-to-male transsexual son, Ellie helped found PFLAG's first support group for families of transgendered children. Formed in 1995, the group is affiliated with the Glenview, Illinois PFLAG chapter in the northern suburbs of Chicago.

The group meets every two months in the Altman's home. Ten families are currently participating, but many more families have contacted the Altmans for information and support. "We hear from people not only in the Chicago area, but also from Indiana, Wisconsin, and around the country," Ellie explains.

Along with sharing life stories and comparing notes about their transgendered children, the parents and family members enjoy having meals at their gatherings. According to Ellie, sharing meals establishes a relaxed atmosphere and an intimate social setting for the meetings.

Speakers, including people from the transgender community and local mental health professionals, have spoken at several meetings.

Transsexual people are a major constituency in the diverse transgender

community, which is broadly defined to include transvestites, cross-dressers, transgendered people (presenting a blend of masculine and feminine traits), drag queens/kings, and male/female impersonators. The term "transgendered" has been adopted as a common categorical term for all males and females who manifest gender identity changes in one fashion or another. Sexual orientation for transgendered people can be either heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, asexual, or non-sexual.

Not all those who are transsexual decide to complete the complex and expensive surgical procedures necessary to align their genital configuration with their gender identity. But for those transsexuals who choose sex reassignment surgery (SRS), access to competent medical services is a must and very much a concern for parents.

P-FLAG

1012 14th St. NW, Ste. 700
Washington, DC 20005
202-638-4200 Voice
202-638-0243 FAX

"It is important to know there is a segment of the medical profession which is knowledgeable, interested, and supportive of transsexual people," Ellie comments.

Ellie has found PFLAG leaders in the Chicago area helpful and supportive in her efforts to provide assistance to the parents and families of transgendered children.

"The Glenview chapter has been very interested in helping us," Ellie confirms. "I am hoping that our group in Chicago will be used as a model by other chapters. I hope there are parents of transgendered children around the country who will contact their local PFLAG chapters, join PFLAG, and establish sup-

port groups like ours," she concludes.

While PFLAG-Glenview is the first chapter to have an affiliated transgendered support group, PFLAG has been providing informational support for families with transgendered children for several years. A transgender resource packet prepared in 1994 is available. A seminar on transgender issues was presented at PFLAG's 1995 convention, and a transgender caucus is expected to develop as a PFLAG Special Outreach Network in 1996. Ellie is a Co-Chair of the developing Special Outreach Network which has the working title PFLAG-T.

Ellie's new son, Andy, is scheduled for his first surgery in February. Ellie and her husband are excited about the change in their child's life.

"We are excited and happy for our son. We feel as though we have a new child. We are joyous about his rebirth. It amazes me that so many transgendered kids are throwaways, as they are called," Ellie says. "Many families cannot deal with their child's gender issue. Just remember, the gay community and their families went through this thirty years ago. Now it is our turn," she says.

Four PFLAG-T representatives attended the PFLAG Regional Director's meeting in Albuquerque (January 19-21, 1996) and delivered a two-hour briefing on the concerns of transgendered people and their families. PFLAG-T's steering committee has also established an e-mail discussion list known as TGS-PFLAG. Those with access to the internet can contact TGS-PFLAG by sending e-mail to Majordomo@mtcc.com. Include the words *Subscribe <your e-mail address>* on the first line of the message. -AΛ

Sharon Stuart is a bi-gendered/transgendered PFLAG parent and the contact person for PFLAG-Cooperstown. She serves as Co-Chair of PFLAG-T. Sharon is also active with ICTLEP, the International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy.

Winning Transgender Acceptance and Understanding at PFLAG

by Dallas Denny

Atlanta Pride is a huge celebration, with hundreds of thousands of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered participants and several hundred vendors, most of which are nonprofit corporations. For the past five years, AEGIS has been at Pride, distributing literature and building bridges. In 1995 and 1996, the various Atlanta transgender organizations worked together to fund and staff a large booth and provide a sizeable contingent of transgender marchers in the parade. But in 1992, 1993, and 1994, there was only a small booth, manned by myself and a few other volunteers.

In 1994, PFLAG had a large and busy booth just across the way in the Pride Market at Piedmont Park. I had heard about this group, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, only when, in 1992 or 1993, one of their chapters volunteered, as a public service, to clean up a section of public highway in North Carolina. Unlike those of any number of other groups, PFLAG's signs were defaced or torn down on several occasions, which resulted in national publicity.

At some point during the Pride 1994, I strolled over to the busy PFLAG exhibit (it seemed every gay man and lesbian in the park was making his or her way to the PFLAG booth to thank them for being there). I introduced myself to one of the half-dozen or so volunteers in the booth and gave her some literature and told her of the almost total lack of support for the families and friends of transgendered and transsexual people. I told her many of the issues facing gay and lesbian people—coming out, job discrimination, rejection by our families—were the same for transfolk, and said we could certainly use their help. "What is your policy," I asked, "about transgendered people?"

My simple question caused considerable confusion. In a chain reaction, each volunteer turned to the next; there were hushed conversations, waving hands, nod-

ding heads. Finally, an answer came back: "Sure, they can come — if they are gay or lesbian," someone told me.

I didn't think the best place to ask PFLAG "What constitutes homosexuality when gender is fluid?" was in the hot sun in a milling crowd on a Sunday afternoon, so a week or two later I sent the Atlanta chapter a letter, accompanied by *Chrysalis*, the AEGIS Transition Series booklets, and other materials, respectfully asking that we begin talking about our common issues.

I didn't get a reply to that letter or to the next, or to two similar letters to PFLAG National. So I sent a third letter, letting both PFLAG-Atlanta and PFLAG National have it with both barrels, accusing them of ignoring transgender and transsexual issues even to the point of not answering correspondence.

That of course, did get dialogue started. I sent lots of educational material to PFLAG National and spoke at a Board meeting of the Atlanta chapter, telling them of the isolation of many transgendered people, and the anguish of their families. The Atlanta chapter did not, of course, come to an immediate decision to throw open its doors to all transfolk, but I had achieved my purpose — we were no longer faceless others, but people made of flesh and blood, and our needs were known to the chapter.

The reaction of PFLAG National was even more positive. Before long, I received a copy of the transgender information packet Sharon mentions in her article on page 8, with definitions taken (with credit, of course) from one of our Transition Series booklets. You can imagine how exuberant I felt when I received that packet!

At approximately the same time that I was in communication with PFLAG-Atlanta, Phyllis Frye and Sarah DePalma approached PFLAG-Houston about trans inclusion. The Houston group was much less receptive than the Atlanta chapter, eventually closing its doors firmly in Phyllis and Sarah's faces. No doubt other

transfolk were approaching other PFLAG chapters at the same time. Obviously, Sharon Stuart was. Who was actually "first" is of little relevance. What was important was that the issue was being raised on a number of fronts, letting PFLAG know transgender/transsexual inclusion was a widespread need, and not just a flash-in-the-pan issue raised by a single person or group.

I was gratified when I learned on the internet that PFLAG had started an electronic mailing list to discuss transgender issues. And I positively beamed when Jessica Xavier kindly sent me Sharon's article from a recent PFLAG newsletter.

I am grateful to and proud of PFLAG for rising to what was a surprise and a challenge — the needs of transgendered and transsexual people and their families. And I'm proud of myself and others in the trans community for educating PFLAG about our issues and winning enough hearts and minds to cause this great organization to serve our own people in a way we have been as yet unable to.

Being the parent, child, or other family member of a gay man or lesbian is a considerable challenge. It takes a great deal of courage to stand proudly beside your gay son or daughter when doing so can draw the ire of the immoderate right and make you a target for hate mail or hate crimes. It takes even more courage to directly challenge the radical right, as PFLAG has done, by striking at its core. Some of you may know PFLAG produced two public service announcements which featured television clips of the venomous anti-gay rhetoric of Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and Jesse Helms, interspersed with quick shots of a gay bashing in one advertisement, and a young girl contemplating suicide in the other.

It took courage to produce those clips. It took another, and perhaps more fundamental type of courage to respond rationally to the issue of transgender inclusion.

Well done, PFLAG! —AN

Good and Bad News Right Here in River City

Supreme Court Shows Right Stuff

20 May, 1996. In a long-awaited decision (*Romer v. Evans*, No. 94-1039), the U.S. Supreme Court declared 6-3 Colorado's anti-gay Amendment 2 unconstitutional, noting in a majority opinion written by Justice Anthony M. Kennedy that full participation in American society is not subject to majority vote, but is a right protected by Amendment 2 (the equal protection clause) of the U.S. Constitution. The Court held that "a law must bear a rational relationship to a legitimate governmental purpose, and Amendment 2 does not." Justice Kennedy noted, "[The protections Amendment 2 withholds for gay people] are... taken for granted by most people either because they already have them or do not need them; these are protections against exclusion from an almost limitless number of transactions and endeavors that constitute ordinary civil life in a free society." Kennedy said that Amendment 2 was motivated largely by spite.

The dissent, written by Justice Antonin Scalia, declared the rule "terminal silliness." Scalia proclaimed that Amendment 2 was not done "in a fit of spite," but as part of a *Kulturkampf* (culture war) against a group with "high disposable income, disproportionate political power, and enormous influence in American media and politics." Nope, not spite at all!

The Supreme Court decision was proclaimed a major victory by G/L/B/T rights groups, and declaimed by conservative organizations like the Family Resource Council and Focus on the Family, with some going so far as to call for impeachment of the six judges voting against Amendment 2.

Toronto Trans Murders

21 May, 1996. Three Toronto prostitutes were found dead of gunshot wounds to the face which police say were from the same gun. One of the three, Deanna Wilkinson, 31 (whose legal name was Thomas), lived as a woman and identified as transsexual. A second, Shawn Keegan, 19, was also transgendered (Keegan was identified as a "transvestite" by the *Toronto Star*). The third victim, Brenda Ludgate, 25, was reported to be transgendered by *Transexual Menace*, but was not.

The murders occurred during the late hours of Toronto's Victoria Day celebration. Wilkinson and Keegan were shot at about the same time, police said; their bodies were found in the same Homewood Avenue neighborhood. Ludgate's body was found across town.

The murders are the latest in a string of unsolved murders of prostitutes in Toronto. A spokesperson for the Canadian Organization for the Rights of Prostitutes said the law was to blame for imposing stiff fines for prostitutes working in houses, much greater than for those working on the street.

Police arrested Marcelo Palma, 30, of North York in Halifax, Nova Scotia on 2 June.

Atlanta Entertainer Dies in Fire

13 May, 1996. Amber Marie Richards, 39, a transgendered woman and popular entertainer in the Atlanta G/L/B/T community, died, along with her companion, Lisa Marie Mazur, 27, and their dog, in a house fire in Smyrna, GA on Sunday night. Smyrna Fire Chief Larry Williams said that the two, who had gone to bed early Sunday morning, were overcome by heat and fumes from a smoldering fire which started on a liv-

ing room table and burned itself out after consuming all of the oxygen in the tightly-enclosed house. Evidence of the fire was not readily apparent from the outside of the house, so concerned friends knocked at the door on Sunday, but did not enter and discover the bodies until Monday night.

Richards, who had lived as a woman for more than 20 years, but who publicly identified as a gay man, was an MC at Atlanta Pride 1995, and was highly beloved in the Atlanta community, where she had worked for many years as an entertainer and bar manager.

HBIGDA Director Dismissed

Alice Webb, Executive Director of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, Inc., a professional organization for medical and psychological caregivers and researchers, said she was terminated in absentia, without notice, and without being given a reason by the HBIGDA Board of Directors this spring. Webb, a psychotherapist who had taken the organization from a moribund state to its present membership of more than 300, said in a telephone conversation that she was hurt and bewildered by the Board's actions. She attributed her dismissal to an ongoing conflict with HBIGDA President Friedemann Pfafflin, and specifically to her repeated requests for a financial accounting of the recent HBIGDA meeting in Germany. Dr. Pfafflin denies that Webb was fired, claiming that she resigned voluntarily due to health reasons.

Judy van Maasdam, the former Executive Director of HBIGDA, has been appointed Acting Director. HBIGDA is currently searching for a new Executive Director..

William A. Henkin is a licensed marriage and family therapist and a board certified sex therapist who specializes in work with the alternate sex and gender communities. He conducts his private practice in San Francisco.

Lieutenant Nun

Review by William A. Henkin, Ph.D.

Lieutenant Nun: Memoir of a Basque Transvestite in the New World, by Catalina de Erauso, translated from the Spanish by Michele and Gabriel Stepto, Foreword by Marjorie Garber. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996. \$16.95.

Four centuries ago, on the night of March 18, 1596, in the Basque region between France and Spain, doña Catalina de Erauso of San Sebastian stole the keys to the convent of Dominican nuns where she had lived since she was four and where she was to take her vows the following day, took scissors, needle, thread, and "some of the pieces of eight that were lying there," and, opening and closing the doors behind her, "shook off my veil and went out into a street I had never seen, without any idea which way to turn, or where I might be going."

After cutting her hair and altering her presentation so that not even her parents recognized her when they met, eventually she turned to the New World, and became a soldier of fortune in the region we have come to call Peru. She became adept with sword, knife, and pistol, and killed many men in battle and in duels. She became a brawler and a gambler, making her way through life by her wits, winning enough at cards and in sharp deals to keep body and soul together on the Spanish Catholic frontier.

At least two matrons tried to marry their daughters to her, and with what grace she could muster in the time, place, and circumstances of her life, she eluded both. She saved her own life several times by taking refuge in whatever church was near, and she escaped hanging by mere minutes on a couple of occasions,

once by declaring herself to be a heretic after the noose was already around her neck. After some 20 years she told her whole story to the bishop of Guamanga, friar don Augustin de Carvajal, who had given her refuge when once more her life was in peril, and was found upon an examination she herself offered under the auspices of local women to be female-bodied and an "intact virgin." She returned to Spain, where she secured a pension for life from the king, went to Rome to receive permission from the Pope to wear men's clothing for the rest of her life (she was Catholic, and it was 1626), and moved to Mexico, where she continued to live as a man, Antonio de Erauso, until her death sometime around 1650.

"Tall and powerfully built, and with a masculine air, she has no more breasts than a girl. She told me that she has used some sort of remedy to make them disappear... She dresses as a man, in the Spanish style. She carries her sword as bravely as she does her life."

According to Michael Stepto, one of the book's translators, one of her friends claimed that Catalina de Erauso wrote *Lieutenant Nun* because she had been given the choice of doing so or being hanged and chose the politic course. This option does not appear in the narrative, which is written without artifice or much in the way of literary style, but in a droll, nearly deadpan tone with fact piling upon fact; instead, the story seems to be part of the legend that has grown up around the author in some parts of the world.

In her foreword, Marjorie Garber, author of *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* and a

book about bisexuality, *Vice-Versa*, notes that "Ultimately the question of 'gender' as category of analysis within seventeenth-century Spanish and New World culture remains a space of negotiation rather than a set of knowable answers." Clearly that is so: it will be impossible for most Americans at the turn of the twenty-first century to even begin to imagine life for anyone living by sword in the mining towns and wilderness of 1610 Peru, and all the more difficult to imagine it from the vantage of Catalina de Erauso's life. But whether in retrospect we see her as a woman who flaunted the conventions of her time and got away with it, or as a transsexual who, like Jack Bee Garland, lived when neither hormone therapy nor gender confirmation surgery was even a far-off fantasy, or as the "transvestite with passions, intelligence, and innate skill" Michael Stepto describes, in reading her memoir we cannot help but see her as someone living on the gantries of gender, not by choice but because there was no other life for her to live.

I've referred to Catalina de Erauso as a woman throughout this brief review because that is what she called herself. But four hundred years ago, how would an FTM have known what other options might exist? A 1639 account of her family, written nearly a decade after she went to Mexico, refers to her as Antonio de Erauso, a brother (*hermano*). The writer, Petro del Valle, who met her in Rome, said, "Tall and powerfully built, and with a masculine air, she has no more breasts than a girl. She told me that she has used some sort of remedy to make them disappear... She dresses as a man, in the Spanish style. She carries her sword as bravely as she does her life."

Perhaps *Lieutenant Nun*, the handle by which she actually came to be known, is as close to an accurate rendering as we can get today. —AN

AEGIS Services on the Internet

AEGIS has been online for little more than a year, and already we have made hundreds of referrals via the internet. In fact, we actually do more referrals by email than we do via mail and telephone!

The internet is an international network of computers, with each computer

having access to every other computer in the system. Anyone who has a PC, a modem and a phone line, or who has access to any of a growing number of sites at universities, libraries, and other public places, can send and receive mail and access the many and varied other parts of the net.

The amount of material stored on the internet is astounding: classic books, government documents, newsfeeds, advertisements, access to thousands of companies, private sites with personal information about thousands of individuals—the variety is endless.

E-Mail: aegis@mindspring.com

Electronic mail allows any computer to send a message to any other computer. E-mail is easy to compose, as it takes no paper, can be sent with the press of a key, and is delivered automatically, usually within minutes. Copies can be sent to dozens or even hundreds of mailboxes simultaneously.

Anyone who needs information about transsexualism or transgenderism or would like a referral can send us information to the address above; we will reply in most cases within a day or so—and sometimes within the hour! You can join AEGIS or order any of our books or other information via e-mail, as well.

Anonymous FTP

*<ftp://ftp.mindspring.com/users/aegis/>
ID: Anonymous / Password: Your e-mail address*

AEGIS maintains an FTP (File Transfer Protocol) site, at which we store several hundred files which include general information about AEGIS, back issues of *Chrysalis* and *AEGIS News*, the Benjamin Standards of Care and DSM-IV diagnostic criteria for Gender Identity Disorder, articles about transsexualism, AEGIS medical advisories and position statements, bibliographic information, a list of gender clinics and other contact information, past postings to our electronic mailing list, graphic files of our order form and much other information. Files can be transferred from the site to remote computers one at a time, or all at once in a self-extracting ZIP file.

Electronic Mailing Lists

An Electronic Mailing List is a community bulletin board of sorts. Posts are distributed to all members of the list as e-mail messages. The list automates the task of keeping track of hundreds or thousands of list members. Anyone with e-mail capability can subscribe to or unsubscribe from a list at any time.

Some lists are open—any member of the list can post; others are moderated, with all posts to the list screened by a moderator, usually the list owner. AEGIS maintains three electronic mailing lists, two of which are open, and one of which is moderated.

AEGISNWS is a moderated list for rapid communication of breaking news and other items of general interest, including press releases from AEGIS and other organizations, notices of upcoming conferences, announcements of new support groups, and other important information. It's a great way to keep up to the minute on current events in the transgender world and a great source of filler for newsletters. Think of AEGISNWS as an electronic teletype.

To subscribe to AEGISNWS, send e-mail to listserv@xconn.com. On the first line of the message, include the following:
subscribe aegisnws

GENDHELP is an open forum for discussion of issues relating to transition and personal growth. Anyone may ask questions or respond to the questions of others.

To subscribe to GENDHELP, send e-mail to listserv@xconn.com. On the first line of the message, include the following:
subscribe gendhelp

AEGIS-LIST is a place for posting and discussion of transgender events and issues in the Southeastern U.S.

To subscribe to AEGIS-LIST, send e-mail to majordomo@mindspring.com. On the first line of the message, include the following:
subscribe aegis-list your e-mail address

World Wide Web Page

<http://www.ren.org/rafil.AEGIS.html>

The World Wide Web is the fastest growing and most exciting part of the internet, for it incorporates color graphics, sound, and hypertext into one package. On the web, it's possible to "surf" from site to site, clicking on topics of interest, jumping from a computer in Michigan to one in the Ukraine to one in South Africa within seconds. Its easy to search for information on the Web; currently, typing the word transsexual in any of the many search engines will lead you straightaway to AEGIS.

At this time, AEGIS has a web page which is provided courtesy of JoAnn Roberts' Creative Design Services. We plan to construct a more extensive web page which will allow netsurfers even easier access to the information stored at our FTP site—and new information as well. —JAX

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