

## Blurbs from Turning Inside Out

### From The Preface

The writing of this book began when I was named one of the 30 Queer Heroes NW of 2017 by GLAPN (Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest), keepers of an archive of the history of LGBTQI people in the Northwest. It surprised me, and my first thought was that I didn't deserve the honor. "I'm no hero," I thought. But, as I listened to the speakers on the night when we were honored, my thinking changed. The point wasn't whether I fit some exalted definition of a hero, but that each of us so honored that year had made contributions that touched the lives of other people.

This caused me to think about times in my life that were not included in the short biography created for that event. Some were moments when I felt positive about how I had reacted, and others were times when I wished I had done better. This got me to thinking about the differences among those situations. I wondered what I had learned that was worth remembering, and that would help me do the best I could in each moment going forward.

All this remembering became a story I told myself – the kind of story we are all capable of telling ourselves – that helps us embed learnings from our lives in our hearts; I didn't much think about writing an actual book. It was all only on the pages of my mind until the fall of 2021 when I attended an online meeting called "Building Community" offered by the LGBTQ+ Alumni Network of my alma mater Dickinson College. Afterwards I reached out and made a connection with Todd Norgren, Director of the Office of LGBTQ Services, who had facilitated the online meeting. I was excited that he had been hired by the college to serve in that role, and wanted to see if there were some way I could build a closer connection with this place I'd graduated from back in 1966-67.

Todd sent me an invite for a Zoom call in late July and we had a lovely conversation. He let me know more about his role and the important work he was doing to engage with Dickinson's LGBTQ+ alumni as well as supporting current students on campus. I talked about the story that was triggered by the GLAPN experience, and Todd invited me to come speak the next spring. I agreed enthusiastically and said I would write up something about my experiences to help make my visit a success. Given the short time between the call and the event, I thought I would produce a short pamphlet that I might expand upon later. I sat down and started writing, and this book is the result.

### From Into The Fire

I am at Boy Haven, a Boy Scout camp, 17 years old in the summer of 1961, and working as a dishwasher to pay my way. Early in the week, we go down to the lake where they ask who can swim. I can, and say so. Pointing to the end of the dock, a counselor says, "Jump in and show us," and then he turns to focus on the other kids. I walk to the end of the dock and jump in. I take with me all that has happened over the years, the loss, the expectations, the hypocrisy. Without hesitation, I go to the bottom of the lake and lie there. A small fish swims past my face, I am at peace; the weight of it all lifts off my shoulders as I wait to die.

Suddenly, a pole hits me in the chest. I grab at it instinctively, and a lifeguard pulls me to the surface. He's done his job, and I am crushed. All I can think of is how shameful it would have been for my family if I'd been successful; one thing that had been drummed into me for years is, "Whatever you do, don't shame your family." No one asks me what happened, they just point to the beginners area and tell me to swim there. I feel like a failure again. I do what I've learned to do, buck up and get on with the job, relieved to just pretend nothing has happened.

#### From Reaching For the Path Out of The Wilderness

At Dickinson, I had a bit of freedom and used it to begin my life as an activist. It started with freshman year. After being politely told by several fraternities that I wasn't their type ("We think you'd be happier somewhere else" was the way they typically said it during Rush Week), I got an invitation from some independent students to come to a gathering. Along with a few upperclassmen and women, we restarted the Independent Students Association. There was almost no organized social life outside the fraternities and sororities, and we started providing it for independent students. In my junior and senior year, I was elected President of the ISA, and we started The Open Door Coffeehouse in the basement of an old women's dorm they let some of us independent men live in for a while. The scuttlebutt was that the fraternities banned their members from attending.

I took the time to read more about American history, the Revolution, the Civil War and World War II. I was angry at the injustice of the world around me; I experienced a bit of it myself in my youth, and instantly identified with the struggles of other people. My awareness had started even in high school. My dad's family has both Scottish and Cherokee ancestry. I knew about the Trail of Tears, and already heard little bits about how the schools' native children were forced to go away from their homes. At Dickinson, I learned, there was an army war college nearby that had originally been the Carlisle Indian School. And, I could see the ways in which poor people and Black people were forced into segregated neighborhoods. The little I was aware of through the news made it clear that racism was alive and well in the South.

Now, while attending college in 1963, I heard about the March on Washington scheduled for August. I knew I had to go there and be a part of speaking up. I left my summer job early and got on a bus for D.C. My sister going to college there was convenient, as she let me sleep on the couch overnight. When I got to the march site the next morning, I knew I was there for more than the rights of Black people; I was there for my own liberation, though I couldn't have articulated exactly how. I was energized by the prospect of millions of ordinary people using peaceful means to end the violence of segregation and discrimination.

#### From The Long Climb Back Home

In two of those (Holotropic Breathwork) sessions, I had an identical experience that took me years to begin to understand. I was lying on my pad and sleeping bag, breathing deeply with the sound of the music and other breathers filling my ears. Suddenly, everything disappeared. I could not hear the music or the other breathers, and I had no sensation of having a body or of lying down. I was immersed in a field of loving, knowing energy. There was no "thing" there, but I had a fleeting sense of an ear lobe or an eyebrow, as if I was being given the gift of knowing that I was part of the beingness, even though "I", the body and ego mind, was not there. While

immersed in this beingness for what seemed like an eternity, there was no sense of time. I was loved, and also “was” love. It defied logic, and I didn’t care.

Suddenly, I awoke. The sensation of my body on the mat and pillow, the sound of the music and of the other breathers around me came back. I was without words or thoughts. I lay there for a while, breathing quietly and just taking in the feelings. I know now that these experiences were the beginning of my coming out as a transgender woman; I needed that powerful of an experience to cut through the self-hate just for a moment. The gift of that presence of an indescribable love, and a knowingness that has no specific “plan” but just knows, has never left me. It would still be a few years before I came out even to myself, but that was the beginning.

### From What Really Matters

I am telling this story because I believe it helps illustrate how even the smallest of acts can be a part of important changes in the world. There are many stories that tell of transgender people’s experiences in getting acceptance from the world around us, of successes in winning our rights, as well as those not yet successful. Many are about the lives of individuals who’ve had a major impact and others are about organizations who have made important contributions. Those stories matter and many have rightfully been told.

In the case of individuals, it may be personal qualities like grit, determination, special training, and of course being in the right place at the right time that plays into their story of success in helping create change. For organizations, it could be their place in the world of nonprofits or political groups, the social, economic, or political standing of their officers, boards or major supporters, years of experience in their field, and of course, luck can play a role.

There are other stories that mostly do not get told, but they also matter because they point to ways anyone can make a difference. I am one of those people. I am not famous, nor did I do anything that would merit any kind of fame. What I did was small in the scheme of things, yet it played a role in bringing about an important change in the lives of transgender people. And, I was motivated by the knowledge that I was lucky in being connected to larger communities of people who could afford to help me out. I knew that this was much harder for transgender people of color. Due to intersecting forms of discrimination, they were much more likely to depend on Medicaid for health care, and to not have access to communities with the same level of resources as I did. In fact, I personally knew and contributed to the campaign of one such woman. Though some of us helped her, she was still not able to afford the surgeries she needed. However, after the denial was overturned by CMS, she had enough money for the copay for her surgeries, and a little left over to get help while healing.

And

As I looked back on my own life, I came to an important realization: just as important as any specific thing I had done was my *way of being* as I was doing it. In my youth, I was angry at the treatment my family and I were subjected to; I was angry and disgusted with what I saw as the lies and hypocrisy of the world around me, at the amount of injustice that I saw being tolerated in my country. I wanted it to all end, and I became uncompromising in my approach. I saw the world in terms of the good and bad people or those who were or were not “in the know”. I set

about informing the rest of my fellow Americans, and just expected them to do the right thing as I and my friends saw it. There wasn't much room for our humanity.

I had to go through much pain and self-revaluation to get to a different place. In fact, it was really me getting back to what I had felt from a very young age: that I had been brought into this world for a purpose, and that had something to do with love. Most of the time, I myself was the biggest impediment to getting to that place, and I got off track for very understandable reasons that I've related in the stories from the earlier parts of my life. There are many things I've done that I wish I had done better, or done from a more enlightened perspective. The truth is that we all can say that to some extent. I believe that I had to go through some of that pain to really get back "home" to what I believe deep down inside.

#### From Living The Paradox

I am not writing this book because I think I have answers for other people. I have them for myself, at least until the next time I grow in some way and the answers change a little. I have reasons why I react the way I do in specific situations, and I have strong beliefs behind what I do in my life. I do not think those are prescriptions for what others should do in similar circumstances. In fact, given how imperfect we human beings are and how little of this amazing world we understand, it would be a mistake for me to try to convince others to do what I have done. I do have an intention, though, and that is to invite you into a conversation based mostly on questions.