On Saturday, August 29, 2015, the New York Times published online the following article which I have radically edited to remove links and ads and such so that it can be kept in an easy to read PDF format.

If you wish to see it online, the links were then (I do not know if they still work):

\http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/30/us/transgender-judge-phyllis-fryes-early-transformative-journey.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=photo-spot-region&region=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&_r=0

When the print version came out the next morning. The article was featured on the front page, above the fold of the Sunday New York Times. It continued onto pages 18 and 19 which were a full two page spread with no ads or other articles.

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

VOL. CLXIV . . No. 56,974 © 2015 The New York Times SUNDAY, AUGUST 30, 2015

Once a Pariah, Now a Transgender Judge

The 4-Decade Journey of Phyllis Frye, a Movement Pioneer

By DEBORAH SONTAG

HOUSTON — Nearly four decades before Caitlyn Jenner introduced herself to the world, Phyllis Randolph Frye came out as a transgender woman in a far less glamorous way. No Diane Sawyer, no Vanity Fair.

It was the summer of 1978. As Bruce Jenner, 26, was celebrating his decathlon victory at the Montreal Olympics, Phillip Frye, 28, was admitting defeat in suppressing his gender identity. He, becoming she, had already lost a lot: He had been forced to resign from the military for "sexual deviation." He had been disowned by his parents, divorced by his first wife and separated from his son. He had been dismissed from several engineering jobs.

Now, with the encouragement of his second wife, Trish, he was starting to transition and wanted to be forthright. Going door to door, he distributed letters to advise the community that the neighbor formerly known as Phil — the husband, fa-

FIRST, PHILLIP Today Phyllis Frye is a Houston judge, the first judge in the nation who was openly transgender. In 1966, though, she was still Phillip, seen here as a cadet Texas A&M.

and born-again Christian; the former Scout, Texas A & M University cand Army lieutenant — was going to iving full time as Phyllis.

esponse, she got her house egged, s slashed, and her driveway spray- with obscenities. Teenagers open- ed her, the engineering profession led her and the federal govern- cted her for a job because of her impersonate the opposite sex."

that bleak, embittering time, Ms. not have imagined that some-

rounded by her many degrees and awards, movie posters for "Tootsie" and "Transamerica," and photographs of Trish, to

der Americans (roughly estimated at 700,000 adults).

But this moment — when transgen-

BRANDON THIBODEAUX FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

U.S. Is Playing In Scramble f

Russia Asserts Itself Opens Opportuni

By STEVEN LEE MYERS

ABOARD COAST GUARD CUTTER ALEX HALEY, in the Chukchi Sea — With warming seas creating new opportunitie at the top of the world, nation are scrambling over the Arctic its territorial waters, trans routes and especially its natu resources — in a rivalry some ready call a new Cold War.

When President Obama trav to Alaska on Monday, becom the first president to ven above the Arctic Circle whil office, he hopes to focus atte on the effects of climate ch on the Arctic. Some lawmak Congress, analysts, and some government official the United States is lagg hind other nations, chief them Russia, in preparing new environmental, ec and geopolitical realities the region.

"We have been for so clamoring about our nat of capacity to sustain a ingful presence in th said Adm. Paul F. Za Coast Guard's comma

Aboard the Alex H creased activity in th obvious in the deep of the Chukchi Sea. ter patrolled one da vessels began to ap another on radar cleared the weste ka and cruised no Circle.

There were t giant barges to shore natural Prudhoe Bay. la of ships and spot where R gan drilling Not far aw maritime b tainer ship were trav Russia dr new Suez The cu

On Wednesday, the radio show called “The Texas Standard” published over NPR stations across the stae of Texas the 18 minute interview found at this link:

http://www.texasstandard.org/shows/current/judge-phyllis-frye/

On Thursday, September 3, 2015, the Houston Chronicle published an Op/Ed piece that I hope you will enjoy found at the following link:

http://www.chron.com/opinion/editorials/article/Unsung-hero-6481607.php

I hope that you take courage from these, Phyllis

Once a Pariah, Now a Judge: The Early Transgender Journey of Phyllis Frye

By DEBORAH SONTAGAUG. August 29, 2015

Photo

Phyllis Randolph Frye, the nation's first openly transgender judge, in her office in Houston last month. In her private practice, she devotes herself to transgender clients.CreditBrandon Thibodeaux for The New York Times

HOUSTON — Nearly four decades before Caitlyn Jenner introduced herself to the world, Phyllis Randolph Frye came out as a transgender woman in a far less glamorous way. No Diane Sawyer, no Vanity Fair.

It was the summer of 1976. As Bruce Jenner, 26, was celebrating his decathlon victory at the Montreal Olympics, Phillip Frye, 28, was admitting defeat in suppressing his gender identity. He, becoming she, had already lost a lot: He had been forced to resign from the military for "sexual deviation." He had been disowned by his parents, divorced by his first wife and separated from his son. He had been dismissed from several engineering jobs.

Now, with the encouragement of his second wife, Trish, he was starting to transition and wanted to be forthright. Going door to door, he distributed letters to advise the community that the neighbor formerly known as Phil — the husband, father and born-again Christian; the former Eagle Scout, Texas A & M University cadet and Army lieutenant — was going to start living full time as Phyllis.

In response, she got her house egged, her tires slashed, and her driveway spray-painted with obscenities. Teenagers openly mocked her, the engineering profession blackballed her and the federal government rejected her for a job because of her "desire to impersonate the opposite sex."

During that bleak, embittering time, Ms. Frye could not have imagined that someday this tiny transgender population would generate a hugely visible movement, and that she would be considered not only one of its pioneers but a pillar of her civic community — the country's first openly transgender judge.

"All my life, I have gotten judged," she said in a recent interview in her office, surrounded by her many degrees and awards, movie posters for "Tootsie" and "Transamerica," and photographs of Trish, to whom she has been married for 42 years.

Ms. Frye, 67, did not watch Ms. Jenner, 65, come out as a transgender woman on national television in late April: "It's old hat to me," she said. Nearly 17 million viewers did, though, as Ms. Jenner tapped into what some have seen as a bafflingly sudden moment of ubiquity for transgender Americans (roughly estimated at 700,000 adults).

But this moment — when transition stories are increasingly and empathetically featured in the media, campuses buzz with gender politics and the president condemns transgender persecution in theState of the Union address — did not materialize out of thin air. It evolved over the last quarter-century as Ms. Frye and others built a transgender civil rights movement, fighting dexterously to rebrand a highly marginalized group; demand, and increasingly win, equal protection under the law; and put the T in L.G.B.T.

Photos

Before transitioning, Phyllis Frye was Phillip, seen here as an Eagle Scout in 1962 and later as a cadet at Texas A&M University.

Despite a historic affinity between gay and transgender people, mainstream gay rights groups did not initially embrace the transgender cause as their own. They saw it as a liability. Yet from the time their far younger movement coalesced, most transgender advocates felt kinship and a practical need to ally themselves with the large, relatively well-financed gay movement.

"We realized that we should have a parallel movement, but also needed to be dug into the L.G.B.T. movement," said Mara Keisling, the executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality. "The folks I work most closely with are all very nice, sweet people, but we had to be such hard asses. At a certain point, we said, 'No more moving gay people ahead without trans people.' "

Having felt the sting of gay groups' rejection long ago, Ms. Frye led some of the earliest sorties in what became a pitched battle for transgender inclusion. She repeatedly argued that homophobia and transphobia were entwined, and made the case that many transgender people are themselves gay.

At the same time, Ms. Frye was one of the first to act on the need for transgender advocates to develop their own legal theories and agenda. In the 1990s, she convened annual transgender law conferences, where grass-roots activists from around the country first met and developed an aspirational transgender bill of rights. Between events, she helped tether the growing network through group emails she called her "Phyllabusters."

“Caitlyn Jenner stands on the shoulders of somebody like Phyllis Frye,” said Shannon Price Minter, the legal director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights and one of several transgender appointees by the Obama administration. “Phyllis is the grandmother of our movement.”

Precursors

When Ms. Frye was a small child, Christine Jorgensen became a worldwide celebrity after traveling to Denmark for gender reassignment surgery: “Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty,” The New York Daily News trumpeted in December 1952; “Bronx ‘Boy’ Is Now a Girl,” said The New York Times.

In the years that followed, while other transsexuals quietly sought treatment abroad, too, no real transgender community developed. There were precursors: private cross-dressing clubs on the West and East Coasts, most notably Hose & Heels (for heterosexual men only), and a gritty urban subculture of drag queens in big cities like New York and San Francisco.

But in San Antonio, in the 1950s, Ms. Frye grew up the middle child in a middle-class home where gender roles, true to the era, were rigidly fixed. Her father was an engineer and a Mason, her mother a stay-at-home mom and amateur painter. Tarzan and Jane, she called them in a speech once.

As a young boy, Phillip Frye coveted his female cousin’s junior bake set and his mother’s spike heels. But he got “the cues” — “not for boys; not for you.” Fearful of detection, he overcompensated with machismo, telling the “dirtiest jokes” with the “foulest mouth.”

“I was so good at being a guy that I should have won an Oscar,” she said. “I was an extremely good Boy Scout — but I would have rather been in the Girl Scouts. I was the R.O.T.C. commander of my high school — but I would have rather been the head cheerleader. And I cross-dressed whenever I could, in private.”

In Phillip’s high school years, his mother uncovered a cache of her own clothing, and underclothing, in her son’s closet. Was Phillip just experimenting? she asked hopefully. Yeah, he said.

“My parents would have pitched me out then if I told the truth,” Ms. Frye said. “Because when I did come out, a decade later, my dad said, ‘You’re dead to me if you do this.’ And he kept his word.”

In 1966, as Phillip Frye was entering the nearly all-male engineering program at Texas A & M, transgender history was being made, though that has come to be understood only in retrospect.

In the Tenderloin district of San Francisco, the drag queens who hung out at Gene Compton’s 24-hour cafeteria rose up against police harassment. Susan Stryker, who

wrote "Transgender History,"published in 2008, considers it the first collective, militant "queer" uprising against police harassment in this country's history. It predated by three years the Stonewall Rebellion, which galvanized the gay rights movement.

Nineteen sixty-six was also the year that Harry Benjamin, a German-born endocrinologist based in New York, published a groundbreaking book, "The Transsexual Phenomenon." Dr. Benjamin advanced the now widely accepted idea that gender identity could be distinct from anatomical gender; he implored the American medical community to help those who so desired align their bodies with their identities through hormones and surgery.

Additionally, the first university-based gender identity clinic in the country opened at the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. Dr. Benjamin's research and the clinic were both bankrolled by one of the doctor's patients, a wealthy transgender man named Reed Erickson; the movement continued to be self-financed by transgender people through the early 2000s.

Wearing the garrison cap of a "fish," or freshman member of the Corps of Cadets, in conservative College Station, Tex., Phillip Frye, like most Americans, had no idea such things were occurring. Like many transgender people of that generation, he thought he was alone, or nearly so.

During his junior year at college, Phillip Frye married his girlfriend. They had a son. While he continued to dress in women's clothing, he did so furtively and shamefully, explaining his secret to his wife only after she caught him.

Upon graduation, he was commissioned by the Army and stationed in West Germany with his family. His marriage began to crumble. Lieutenant Frye revealed the reason behind the marital discord to his superiors, and was sent back to the United States, where he made a good-faith effort to be "cured."

He underwent drug therapy, hypnosis and aversion therapy, in which he was induced to vomit while handling women's underwear. The therapies didn't work. His wife filed for divorce.

And in mid-1972, the Army, citing a diagnosis of "transvestism, chronic, treated, unchanged, manifested by the compulsive need to wear female clothing," accepted his resignation "in lieu of elimination." He was granted an honorable discharge because he had been forthright about his personal life.

Photo

Ms. Frye as a new lawyer in 1981.

Not long afterward, he slit his wrists.

At a Low Point

Looking back, Ms. Frye considered her suicide attempt out of character. It was “the ultimate in self-pity,” she wrote in autobiographical notes contained in the Phyllis R. Frye Collection, part of the L.G.B.T.Q. Archive of Cushing Memorial Library at Texas A&M.

Material in the collection helps piece together what happened next, filling in elements of a life story that Ms. Frye does not relish retelling at this juncture. (Instead, she gave The Times a thumb drive with her "war stories" from that period, as delivered in speeches.)

The collection includes personal correspondence and a curious document, a 49-page government investigation report, based on scores of interviews with Ms. Frye's neighbors, colleagues and associates and written by a Civil Service adjudicator when she applied for a federal job.

After hitting that low point in 1972, Phillip Frye rallied, found work as a civil engineer, became a born-again Christian and fell in love with Trish, who briefly broke off their engagement but came to accept the cross-dressing.

"She said something to the effect of, 'If you can stop short of surgery, I will try to learn to accommodate the rest,' " Ms. Frye explained in a speech in 1999.

Others were not so accepting. Phillip Frye lost a job at his alma mater after the department chairman heard rumors he was shopping for women's clothing in College Station, his former supervisor told investigators.

"Source stated that he was able to get subject a job in Pennsylvania and apparently subject assumed a very masculine role while working in Pennsylvania," the report said. "According to source, he got married to his current wife, Trish, while in Pennsylvania and grew a full-length beard."

The couple returned to Houston in late 1974. Phillip Frye, who was starting to venture out at night in women's clothing, continued to get and lose engineering jobs. Finally his wife urged him to stop living a double life.

And in an era when most transgender people, for their own preservation, "lived stealth," as it was called, Ms. Frye came out with a megaphone.

"I put on my skirts five weeks ago, and I have not taken them off," she said in the fall of 1976, in one of many lectures about her gender identity that she volunteered to give at local universities. "During the past five weeks, I have felt normal for the first time in 28 years."

Ms. Frye described herself in the lectures as a "transgenderist." She was adopting a term popularized byVirginia Prince, founder of Hose & Heels and Transvestia magazine, who introduced it in the 1960s to describe people who lived full time in the "gender opposite to their anatomy" without having surgery.

In addition to the letters left with her neighbors, Ms. Frye wrote hundreds to relatives and ex-classmates. Robert L. Boone, director of the Singing Cadets at Texas A&M, was one of the few who wrote back.

"I am not able to emotionally or intellectually accept you as Phyllis," he said.

Mr. Boone, who is now deceased, referred to alumni participation in concerts: “As a former singing cadet, Phil (Fish) Frye, the guy we knew, is welcome to join us. However Phyllis Frye is a stranger to us, and is not a former Singing Cadet, and therefore would not be welcomed on stage.”

NOTE BY FRYE AFTER PUBLICATION: Bob Boone and the Singing Cadets came around and became great friends and great supporters.

At the end of an agonizing 13-page missive to her mother, Ms. Frye begged for acceptance: “Let me be the Phyllis that cries to emerge.” She closed, in her peppery fashion, “I love you all. Don’t trade my balls for my heart,” signing the letter, “Phil.”

After a long period of unemployment, during which she was reduced to accepting Christmas food donations from her church, Ms. Frye applied for the government job. And, despite the gossip and prejudice they shared with investigators, all but one of those interviewed recommended Ms. Frye without reservation, saying she was “a loyal citizen of the United States.”

But the government rejected her. In a 1977 letter addressed to Mr. Frye — though by this time she had legally changed her name to Phyllis — the adjudicator excoriated her “pattern of unorthodox practices.” He described her as a “disruptive influence” in her community, “parading around in short shorts, dresses and other female attire.”

Ms. Frye responded by telling the official that she was dismayed by the “disgust-filled manner” in which he had exercised his “administrative duty.”

“I am not worthy of the extreme dislike which glares out at me from your letter,” she wrote. She added, “I don’t own any short shorts.”

‘Voice-y People’

Photo

A march on Washington in the mid-1980s. The history of the transgender fight for civil rights and protections goes back for decades.

Like the mainstream gay movement, the transgender movement was initially dominated by white professionals. Their privilege shielded them from the harsher realities of extreme poverty and deadly violence encountered by many of their constituents. It also, some say, gave them an edge.

“Take my case — and Phyllis is similar,” said Ms. Keisling, the transgender leader. “I grew up white, middle class, educated and male. Suddenly I found myself marginalized. But I had always had the privilege to speak up. A lot of civil rights movements start from voiceless people. Our movement had a lot of voice-y people.”

From the moment Ms. Frye transitioned, terrified of being arrested, she waged a battle against a Houston ordinance that made cross-dressing illegal.

Such laws not only criminalized gender identity, they also created a wedge with the gay community. Drag, a transgender magazine, published an editorial in 1972 that denounced gay clubs in New York for barring drag queens, who were seen as creating a justification for police raids. “The only thing we can do is yell a lot,” the editorial acknowledged, “and embarrass the clubs as they continue to say, ‘Go away, little girl, we can’t allow you to stay.’”

In Houston, Ms. Frye lobbied city leaders for four years until the cross-dressing law was repealed in 1980. By that time she was pursuing a law degree, which she hoped would give her “the tools to defend myself against all the crap that was dished my way.”

The self-defense, combined with a charm offensive, began in law school itself, at the University of Houston. During her first semester, she felt shunned. Determined to break out of her isolation, she requested the seating charts for her classes, memorized her classmates’ names and approached them one by one. She tussled with the administration to gain access to the women’s restroom, the kind of fight that continues to this day.

“The public has a deep fear of trans people in bathrooms, and specifically of penises in girls’ rooms,” said Chase Strangio, a transgender lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union’s LGBT & AIDS Project. “We organize our society around very fixed notions of who men and women are, and people whose very existence challenges that provoke visceral, irrational reactions.”

The Christian Legal Society, where Ms. Frye sought solace, was so provoked. Its members began meeting secretly to avoid praying with her — until she got their group suspended for discrimination.

In law school, she was undergoing significant physical changes as she adjusted to feminizing hormone therapy and underwent electrolysis forher facial hair.

“I was kind of a mess,” she said, “but I graduated, and nobody booed or heckled me when I walked across that stage for my diploma.”

Unable to find a firm willing to hire her and reluctant to hang out her own shingle, Ms. Frye peddled Amway cleaning products and worked occasionally as an engineering consultant.

After getting a case by chance and winning it, Ms. Frye felt emboldened to solicit work from judges who appointed counsel for indigent defendants. Little by little, she developed a specialization in criminal defense and made herself a fixture in the Harris County Courthouse, wearing big hats in an effort to make her headwear, not her gender identity, her signature.

Politically, she was active with the state Democrats, the League of Women Voters and the local gay and lesbian caucus, where she routinely crossed paths with Annise Parker, who is now in her third term as Houston’s mayor.

At one point in the 1980s, Ms. Parker gave Ms. Frye a ride to a conference. During the drive, Ms. Frye confided that she sorely missed playing sports, and that no women's team would let her join.

Ms. Parker, who coached a lesbian softball team, looked over at the strapping, 5-foot-10 woman beside her and thought, "I really need a power hitter."

"I got back to her later and said, excuse the pun, 'I'm willing to go to bat for you,' " Ms. Parker said.

Ms. Frye, who had watched admiringly as the transgender tennis player Renée Richards won the right to compete as a woman in theUnited States Open in 1977, became the first transgender woman in Houston's lesbian softball league. She and her wife, who were socially isolated, found themselves welcomed into a community.

Ms. Frye did not become the reliable power hitter that Ms. Parker had hoped for, however.

"She only wanted home runs," Ms. Parker said. "She was always swinging for the fences."

Liberating Feelings

For years, apart from scattered support groups, transgender people had no way to find one another.

And then came the Internet.

In the early 1990s, Gwendolyn Smith, a desktop publisher at a California reprographics company, stumbled on an offer for five free hours on something called America Online. She discovered chat rooms and, in particular, one named TV Chat. (The community referred to itself then as TV/TS — transvestite/transsexual.)

Relative anonymity was liberating.

"It was on American Online that I first identified myself regularly by a feminine name and gender and explored my trans feelings," said Ms. Smith, now a columnist for The Bay Area Reporter in San Francisco."I found my people."

After some initial resistance from AOL, Ms. Smith opened a dedicated chat room for transgender people, The Gazebo. It became a gathering place, a resource center and a bulletin board.

"When The Gazebo happened, all hell broke loose," Ms. Keisling said. "Suddenly there was a place where we could be out in a safe way and build a community and grow a voice."

By the mid-1990s, Ms. Smith said, The Gazebo had tens of thousands of unique visitors a month. Many veteran leaders of the transgender movement first connected there —

and first assembled in 1992 when Ms. Frye summoned them to a Hilton Hotel in Houston for the International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy.

Like others, Ms. Frye was frustrated that gay groups had distanced themselves from the transgender cause. Although transgender activists like Sylvia Rivera had played a prominent role at Stonewall, a rift developed afterward. In the early 1970s, mainstream gay groups came to emphasize "a gender normative model of gay identity," as Mr. Minter, the White House appointee, put it.

"The Gucci-shoes crowd, the gays and lesbians on Wall Street, they saw us as a politically embarrassing subgroup," Ms. Frye said. "In Houston, the gay and lesbian political caucus thought we were going to slow down their progress. So it became, 'If they're going to shut us out, then we're going to do our own thing.'"

Ms. Frye put the expenses for the first conference on her personal credit card and crossed her fingers that people would show up. They did.

"Those conferences were like lifelines," said Paisley Currah, a political scientist at Brooklyn College and co-editor of Duke University Press'sTransgender Studies Quarterly. "It was very exciting to meet other transgender activists face to face, and to cement the networks that were going to be necessary to put the movement in place."

In addition to articulating legal theories in areas like transgender employment, housing and health law, conference participants drafted the International Bill of Gender Rights, which proclaimed, "All human beings have the right to define their own gender identity regardless of chromosomal sex, genitalia, assigned birth sex or initial gender role."

Photo

A national transgender lobbying day in Washington in 1996, with Ms. Frye at the lectern.

At the conferences' helm, Ms. Frye delivered motivational lectures, typically ending with a call to action: "Once again I say this to you, my sisters and my brothers, if I could do that in the late '70s and early '80s, what is your excuse? You have no reason for staying scared. You have no reason for staying closeted. You have no reason for not being the true person that you are. This is our decade. Make it happen for you now."

She had recently cleared some hurdles herself. She had rebuilt a relationship with her son, by then in his 20s, although the reconciliation lasted only about a decade. (Her son declined to be interviewed.) She had also undergone a removal of the testes, which reduces testosterone, and won the right to amend her birth certificate.

Ms. Frye never opted for full gender-reassignment surgery. Ahead of her time, she firmly believed that surgery did not "complete" a gender change and should not be imposed on transgender people to justify a legal gender change on identification documents. "For many years I have been about the business mostly of freeing our community from the legal need of the scalpel," she said in a speech in the 1990s.

During that period, for personal and political reasons, she and others consciously adopted "transgender" as an umbrella term.

“We framed the relevant community as broadly as possible to make the case that we’re all in this together — not just transsexual people but people who cross-dress, butch lesbians, feminine gays and so on,” Mr. Minter said.

Mr. Minter himself was going through a transition that would prove useful as a bridge between the gay and transgender communities. When he joined the National Center for Lesbian Rights as a lawyer, he identified as female and lesbian. In the mid-1990s, he found himself a transgender man inside the lesbian rights movement — and kept his job.

This was at a difficult time, when gay groups were allowing transgender people to be excluded from statewide nondiscrimination laws “left and right,” said Lisa Mottet, deputy executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality. Minnesota, in the vanguard, had included transgender people in 1993, but it was eight years before a second state, Rhode Island, followed suit.

The tone was set on high. The Human Rights Campaign, the largest gay rights organization in the country, agreed to drop transgender people from the federal Employment Nondiscrimination Act when it was introduced in Congress in 1994. (The legislation failed then and has yet to win passage.)

“That started the war with H.R.C., and it was a war,” Ms. Frye said.

Afterward, Ms. Frye and a handful of others, notably Riki Anne Wilchins, who had founded a grass-roots activist group called Transsexual Menace, took matters into their own hands. They started a transgender lobbying day in Washington. They also found common cause with another frustrated group.
“In 1995, when I went to my first Creating Change conference,” Ms. Frye said, referring to the large gathering on gay issues, “the trans caucus and the bisexual caucus had a combined meeting and decided to carry each other’s water.”

Photo

Ms. Frye with the talk show host Phil Donahue in 1989 for an episode about people disowned by their families.

On the West Coast, another branch of the movement was gelling. San Francisco's Human Rights Commission produced a comprehensive report on discrimination against transgender people that served as a template for grass-roots groups across the country.

Also in San Francisco, Ms. Smith, horrified to learn of the stabbing death of a transgender woman named Rita Hester in Massachusetts, raised the topic in The Gazebo one night in 1998. She compared the case to the murder the previous year of another transgender woman, Chanelle Pickett. Nobody in the chat room had heard of Ms. Pickett.

"It struck me that we were ignorant of the scope of violence against our community," Ms. Smith said.

She started a web project, "Remembering Our Dead," shortly before the 1999 film "Boys Don't Cry" created broad awareness of such violence by dramatizing the real-life story of a transgender man, Brandon Teena, who had been slain.

Ms. Smith's web project grew into the International Transgender Day of Remembrance, which is observed every Nov. 20 across the country and around the world. Ms. Keisling calls it "our sacred holiday."

By the turn of the millennium, many thought it was time to professionalize the all-volunteer transgender movement. Ms. Frye was increasingly representing transgender clients in name-change and discrimination cases, merging her political and professional work. She was also starting to run out of steam, she said.

"And then Mara came along," she said, referring to Ms. Keisling, who financed the creation of the National Center for Transgender Equalityin Washington in 2003. "She had the courage to move to D.C. My wife didn't want to, and all my political chits were here. So there was kind of a passing of the baton."

Barriers Fall

In 2003, George W. Bush became the first president to welcome an openly transgender person into the White House.

It happened during a reunion for his Yale class of 1968. Making her way through the president's receiving line, a woman in an evening gown extended her hand. "Hello, George," she said. "I guess the last time we spoke, I was still living as a man."

Mr. Bush smiled and graciously responded, "And now you're you," according to the woman, Petra Leilani Akwai.

Photo

Ms. Frye speaking at the 1993 march on Washington for gay rights.

Most of the big transgender advocacy organizations started up during the Bush years: the equality center, the Transgender Law Center, theSylvia Rivera Law Project, the Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund, and the Center of Excellence for Transgender Health, among others. But they did not push for federal policy changes during his presidency, despite the momentum that was building for their cause. On local and state levels, they were winning new laws protecting transgender people from discrimination, and they had persuaded the major gay and lesbian groups — even the Human Rights Campaign — to take up their struggle. Still, they feared a backlash.

And they were heartbroken in 2008 when the Human Rights Campaign breached their détente, once again making a political compromise to exclude transgender people from the federal Employment Nondiscrimination Act

This time, though, Ms. Frye said, “the tide had finally changed.”

“The gay community went wild,” she continued. “Every state equality group was up in arms.”

When President Obama took office, advocates presented him with a long wish list of proposed changes in federal policy. And despite an initial reticence about publicly expressing support for transgender people, his administration opened its doors to them.

“Dozens of us have been at the White House dozens of times for meetings,” Ms. Keisling said.

In October 2009, a few months after Chaz Bono — the only child of the singers Sonny and Cher — came out as a transgender man, Mr. Obama signed a hate crimes law, the first federal legislation to recognize and protect transgender people. That required an act of Congress, but most of what followed were rule changes.

The State Department took a first big step, eliminating an outmoded requirement of sex reassignment surgery for people who sought to change gender on their passports.

Following the lead of the courts, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission then ruled that antitransgender bias was a form of sex discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.

Agency after agency, on federal, state and local levels, ordered explicit protections for transgender people and, in some cases, mandated insurance coverage for transition-related health care. Gay and civil rights groups increasingly fought transgender discrimination in court, sometimes with Justice Department support. Legally at least, barriers started falling away.

In 2013, after over a decade of badgering from transgender advocates, the psychiatric establishment formally reclassified gender identity disorder as a “condition,” removing the stigma of mental illness. The next year, Chad Griffin, president of the Human Rights Campaign, issued a formal apology, saying, “H.R.C. has done wrong by the transgender community,” and pledging “a new chapter.”

Transforming History

In the court of public opinion, with the marriage equality campaign moving toward success, a climate of acceptance was growing and extending from sexuality to gender identity. “Suddenly people liked us,” Ms. Keisling said.

It helped that the movement was growing younger and more diverse. In 2013, a website called “We Happy Trans” published its inaugural “Trans 100” list, which included veterans like Ms. Frye but also new stars, like Laverne Cox, 31, a black transgender actress featured in the Netflix television series “Orange Is the New Black.”

To be sure, as Ms. Cox often emphasizes, life remains excruciatingly hard for many transgender people who continue to face discrimination, hostility and violence in many

families, neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, police precincts and prisons. Rates of attempted suicide, H.I.V. infection, unemployment, poverty and homelessness are exceptionally high, especially for transgender women of color.

Still, seen through Ms. Frye's long lens, the progress is undeniable.

After more than four decades with her wife — "and even though I had hair on my face when Trish and I married" — Ms. Frye exhaled deeply when the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage, she said.

"It's always been in the back of our minds all these years, that somebody could challenge us," she said.

In her private law practice, which she maintains alongside the part-time judgeship, she exclusively represents transgender people now, and is taking ever more children through the process of changing their names and gender markers. "Their parents call me," she said. "Who'd have imagined?"

She does not miss the intensity of the struggle, she said. "I've enjoyed my 60s. I haven't had to fight."

Though she watches the movement's building momentum with occasional incredulity — "Even the military!" she exclaimed, referring to the announcement in July that the Pentagon plans to lift its ban on service by openly transgender people — she has been waiting with impatience for society to catch up with her.

"I keep wondering what took her so long," she said about Caitlyn Jenner's introduction to the world. "She could have done a lot of good."

New Normal

Photo

Ms. Frye at Bering United Methodist in Houston roughly a decade ago for a community discussion about including transgender people in the local mission of the gay and lesbian community.

One night this summer, in a basement courtroom at the Houston Municipal Courthouse, Ms. Frye emerged from chambers, zipping up her robe over her khakis and telling a smattering of defendants, “Don’t get up.”

Under a low ceiling, she settled on the bench, between the American and the Lone Star flags, in front of a framed photograph of Mayor Parker, who fought back tears at Ms. Frye’s swearing-in in 2010.

Chatting with the clerks, the judge questioned the air-conditioning — “Is it hotter than a firecracker in here, or is it just me?” — and described how she lost 70 pounds over the last few years, changing her diet and working out daily in her fitness room (at the same modest house that was egged decades earlier).

For the next several hours, she dealt amiably and efficiently with a sleepy stream of mostly sheepish traffic violators.

“Hawkins,” she said, summoning a jaunty man wearing earrings. “How are you?”

“I’m doing pretty well, judge. Yourself?” Mr. Hawkins replied.

“I’m terrific,” Ms. Frye replied. “You were supposed to bring $279 plus your license plus proof of insurance.”

Mr. Hawkins said he had run into a “small problem.” He was unable to get a new license because he owed $2,200 in surcharges to the city.

“I hope you’re not driving now,” Judge Frye said, holding up her hand. “Don’t tell me. Don’t tell me.”

She gave him a 60-day extension, and he thanked her, saying he had never gotten one that long before.

“Well, you ain’t getting any more,” she said.

If prosaic authority is the summit of normalcy, then Ms. Frye, who once harangued a federal official for treating her like “a freak,” has reached it.

“Whatever normal means,” she added.