

**TRANSGENDERED MEMBER  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS**

For today's presentations, for the record, for the transcripts and the audio proceedings, I am Phyllis Randolph Frye, Attorney, Houston, Texas, and a member of the Lesbian, Gay and Transgender Community. As you know, each of the nine committees that we've had going on meeting for the past two days will be making a 40 minute presentation. As to the current status of the law in their area of their committee assignment as regards to the Transgender Community. And then after they present that current status, they're going to present strategies for progressive change. They're often going to suggest ideas for legislative and regulatory change.

This is the hub of our conference: Strategies for progressive change with suggestions for legislative and regulatory change. Because we have to shape our future as the transgender community. Because quite frankly, as we've discovered in committee, the current status of the law pretty much either stinks or is ignorant of who we are and operating on myth and stereotype or is silent.

We need strategies. That's another reason why we've had so many lay people involved. Sure we've had lawyers involved. We also have lay people involved because many lay people in our community are activists. And as long as I and several of the people who are managing this thing now and in the near future, we're laying plans for the next conference, are involved in this we are going to ensure this is not just for lawyers but this is for lay people also, even though we are talking about the law.

And this is not just for the transgender community. We feel great alliance to and feeling of shared repression with our lesbian sisters and our gay brothers. A lot of that is because the people that persecute them or people that persecute us are the same people.

Before I begin with the first speaker, I want to tell you a little story about the National Association for Women Business Owners and about my association with them. Throughout this conference, I've been telling you little stories. The reason why is because I want to make you feel comfortable with your being a transgendered person. I also want to make you feel uncomfortable if you have been relatively inactive in establishing yourself as who you are. I want you to know that the world out there is yours, and I want you to know that if you have the nerve to take a piece of it, you can have it. So, I will continue to present little stories.

"Monday, 3:00 p.m., 21 November 1977; 1708 Sunset Boulevard at Ouisie's Table." That was on my calendar. I'd been Phyllis at that time for only 14 months, a week, and a day. And I'd been unemployed for 17 months. I was sitting at a Cafe called Ouisie's

Table enjoying this soft drink with other women that I'd met during my journey to get to Houston cross-dressing ordinance repealed. I had found a home with many of the feminists in Houston, and for the most part I had been accepted.

A year prior to this, I'd met the women's advocate for the office of the Mayor. Our Mayor then was Fred Hofheinz. Her name was Ms. Nicki Van Hightower. We chatted about the Women's Movement in general, about me, and the ordinance specifically. Nicki has been a definite leader of the Women's Rights Movement in this region, and we have been allies often even since then. In January 1977 a new Mayor came on board and he and City Council effectively sacked Nicki and her office. Those macho rascals had hated her for a long time because she had dared to speak the truth about unequal pay for equal work and about the many restrictions placed on women seeking to advance professionally within the city bureaucracy. As a result of her being sacked the feminists in Houston mobilized. We packed City Council Chambers to protest and we protested for several days thereafter.

Yes, I was acceptable to these women because I was a soldier in the struggle. This was the Houston grassroots of what many women take for granted today. And even though they take advantage of the gains, they shrink from the label "feminist" because they didn't fight the fight. Shortly thereafter I got active working as a volunteer in the City Council Race for Marilyn Whited, who made a serious bid but alas she lost. There were very few women elected to anything back then. These were the forerunner days to Kathy Whitmire being elected Controller and later on she was elected Mayor.

As a result of my involvement, I was accepted. When the mailout was issued for the organizational meeting of the Houston Chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners, acronym NAWBO, I received one of the invitations. There I was in Ouisie's Table, hoping to use my Engineering degree somehow and earn some money somehow. I was still into the struggle to receive unemployment compensation because of a homophobic state agency. Can you imagine being unemployed for as long as I was, what a big proportionate cost it was for me to come up with a hundred fifteen dollars on that day for my charter membership? It was significant.

Several of us at that meeting joined and decided to form the nucleus and form the Board and elected officers. For the next several months I went to many meetings, trying to help to get this group established in Houston.

In January the first President, I don't remember her last name, but her first name is Jeannie, called my spouse and me because she had only been in Houston for about 10 months and she had just been raped and she was scared. We spent much time helping her initially through the ordeal and fear. I really felt like I was contributing. I really felt like I was making a contribution and I was a worthy individual; that I had talents that were accepted and acceptable. And that has a lot to do with building the ego whenever we are going through a transition, especially if we're unemployed.

Just before the February Board meeting that year, I was asked to resign. I was asked to resign by a very rude and homophobic person named Martha and I know her last name and I see her at events and around the city. She's an Attorney in Houston. She continues to be very rude and very homophobic. The rest of the Board sat silent as Martha chased me out because of my being transgendered. She had convinced the others that no one else would join the group. So I left.

You know I cried a lot in those years. I went through a lot of rejection from other local groups during that time. I went to the Houston A & M Club trying to establish myself as just another human being who needed work and was unemployed. I attended many meetings of the American Society of Civil Engineers and others. It was pure hell. I became very bitter during these years. So bitter that I can only go back in my memory of those times, for short periods of time and at a very shallow depth, or else the intensity reinvades my ego. Even as I stand here now and start to read to you some of these events, I can feel the bitterness well up inside.

Obviously as all of you know, things are great now. Things are great now! I practice law successfully. I am very much out of the closet. My spouse and I have already celebrated our 19th year together and all is very well for us. You also know from an early presentation this week that my son, my 22-year old son, and I are getting along famously.

In July of 1991, a year ago this summer, I met a NAWBO person. We chatted and she asked me to join. I told her the story that I've just told you. She was appalled. She apologized right there on the spot, and she said that should never have happened. Obviously, she wasn't involved in it then. Obviously, also she talked to some people in the group because a week later I received a membership application from the local chapter. I wrote a letter to the membership Chair and I told her again the same story I am telling you now. I told her that if I was going to come in that

she better present this to the Board, cause I didn't want to go through what I'd just gone through. The day after the subsequent Board meeting, my answering machine had a message and it said come to the next general meeting.

I've since rejoined with the NAWBO. I'm out of the closet there. I am well accepted. Dee McKeller has been to a meeting. Cynthia Davis has been to a meeting. Two NAWBO people who started their own businesses out of their garages are going to attend the September meeting of the Gulf Coast Transgender Community. As part of our meeting that night we will be trying to encourage people not to fear loss of job because of the alternative of starting their own business. The regional director of the small business administration as well as these two NAWBO members are going to make a presentation that night. They have listed me in their membership directory as being a charter member. When I went to one of their meetings I took the brochures for this conference. They expressed great interest, and they wished me great amount of luck.

Transition in 1992 is difficult. I am not going to tell you that it is not difficult, but I assure you the transition in 1992 is much easier than it was in 1976. I started in 1976 and I made it. You need to start today 'cause you will make it, the times are better. This is our decade. Make it our decade. There are very many good-hearted people. They were back there then and there are even more now. Educate them, take the risk, and reach out.