

## Interview Summary – Trans Activism Oral History

Interviewee name:	Yvonne Cook-Riley
Interviewer:	Evan Taylor
Date of Interview:	January 7, 2020

### Summary:

Yvonne is 78 years old on the day of the interview and has been married for 28 years. She has a background in marketing, trade show work, and event management – and she currently works for the city, planning events throughout the year. Yvonne talks about the early days where cross-dressing was very fetishistic - drag queens were very prominent and she recalls Lee Brewster's store, but there were no drag kings. She recalls cross-dressing as a young child, at 4 years old, and getting beaten as punishment.

Yvonne describes multiple types of early community making for trans people: from drag balls, to carnivals, to S&M, and theatre. She describes a relationship of tension with Virginia Prince, based on Prince's conservatism. And she also remembers meeting Christine Jorgensen and having breakfast with her and talking about CJs fear of getting old in a trans body. Yvonne talks about the impact of HIV on the community and trans people going back into the closet and she identifies her anger as being a main source of her activism work. She talks about the early days of her transition and the different types of support groups that were available to her.

She reflects on the variability of sex and gender in nature and throughout various cultures, as well as the medical model of understanding trans people and its function in capitalism. Yvonne talks about the power dynamics and politics of different support groups and the lack of presence of trans masculine people at those groups.

In order to get in contact with other trans people before the internet, Yvonne remembers people using the hanky code and the outreach method of putting crisis line cards into the card catalogue at the library under "transvestite" or "cross-dresser" for people to call a phone booth.

Yvonne was at the inaugural IFGE meeting and was part of putting together the first convention in Chicago. She went on to do hundreds of radio shows and dozens of talk show appearances. And, in 1991, she wrote the definition for the word "transgendered" for the Oxford dictionary. She discusses various factors for change and considers possible regrets about getting involved in activism and the larger push for change.

Then, she tells a story of having a hotline phone under her bed for 3 years. 1988-1991. And gives a few examples of memorable calls. During the years of the hotline, she had a 3-step question process that she would use to understand the person who was calling and the kind of information that they would need.

Yvonne sees nonbinary young people as the way of the future and talks about the role of sci-fi in making sense of the future. She reflects on the spiritual role of thinking outside of binaries.

Yvonne's partner once lived a year as a man and put together the first gathering of FTMs in Boston in 1998. She talks about Kindred Spirits - a group that was centered on transgender community and spirituality - and how important it was to her, but that it became inactive after Holly Boswell's death.

Yvonne is a veteran of the Vietnam war and talks about her work with organizing transgender veterans. She talks about her spiritual worldview and also about her family dynamics and a recent visit with her brother. She also talks about names, her own birth name of Evan, and the identity meaning of names for trans people. At the very end, she talks about her and her spouse being with Merissa Sherrill Lynn as she was dying and the value of that commitment.