

Interview Summary – Trans Activism Oral History

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| Interviewee name: | Dallas Denny |
| Interviewer: | Evan Taylor |
| Date of Interview: | January 28, 2020 |

Summary:

Dallas begins by describing the various places she has lived and the work she did as an applied behavioural analyst. She has a Master's in Psychology and began doctoral work, but that fell apart after her transition when her chair refused to schedule her candidacy meeting. Dallas never knew her father, but was told he was a pilot. She believed he may have been Cherokee, but her DNA testing says she's 100% Caucasian.

She was turned down for treatment in 1978 at Vanderbilt University because they didn't think she was dysfunctional enough to be a transsexual. She then contacted a cross dresser support group she saw on the Donahue show in 1979 and contacted Virginia Prince who turned her down due to her "no transsexuals" policy. When Dallas saw Tapestry magazine and learned about transsexualism, she started to look for any information she could find. She wrote her own (illegal) prescription for estrogen and started hormones and electrolysis. After being rejected by Vanderbilt, the copy of Tapestry and running a support group became very important to her, but there were conflicts that led her to create AEGIS and the Chrysalis quarterly.

Dallas also started running a support help line out of her house and was up answering calls late into the evening and morning hours. It was important to her to be able to distribute as much information as possible to people who needed it. Dallas talks about the internet becoming widely available in 1993 as a game-changer for being able to distribute information to trans people. Dallas talks about the plethora of work she created in the 90s: from websites, GenderPAC, to editing Tapestry magazine, to writing many book chapters and keynote speeches. She also outlines the current work she is able to do and talks about the limited choices that were available as life paths for trans people - as per Anne Bolin: cross-dresser, transsexual, drag queen. Dallas lists numerous people she has worked with and done advocacy work with over the years: James Green, Holly Boswell, Melissa Cheryl Lynn, Allison Lang. She then goes on to describe her intimate knowledge and notable friendship with Virginia Prince and the ways that their politics both connected and very much diverged.

The conversation then turns to the various terminologies about trans and gender identity that have been used and how Dallas has related to each of those individually: transsexual, cross dresser, transgender, LGBT, Tranny, Transie, etc. She also talks about the in-community judgements and disagreements - particularly the tensions between transsexuals and cross-dressers. There is an ongoing discussion about TERFs and lesbian feminist politics and the inclusion of trans women, including the problematics of Michael Bailey's book.

Dallas talks about her own writing and her goal of being able to reach sympathetic medical professionals as well as being able to expand the knowledge base about what interventions were needed - i.e. electrolysis before surgery. She also talks about the risks of surgeons such as John R. Brown who harmed many trans people.

Dallas describes various types of calls she would get while running her information line: from shoe fetish callers, to letters from 13-year-old kids, or people in prison. One of the other things that she did in those days would be to go on television shows that would put her address up on the screen for people to contact her. She would also drag out invitations in order to kill storylines that were transphobic or discriminatory. She reflects on some moments in her own transition and family relationships that had to adapt and talks about having a sense of humour as being a key to successful transitioning.