



Milwaukee LGBT History Project, Inc.

Loree Cook-Daniels

As a civil rights activist, Loree Cook-Daniels is engaged with several issues, including aging, public policy, and LGBT rights. In her early twenties Loree helped organize the historic 1979 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. The march was the first of its kind, drawing approximately 100,000 people who demanded equal civil rights for gays and lesbians. It was also one of the first times that Loree was exposed to transgender identity and issues. During the planning stages, organizers debated whether to include trans people in the march's platform and name, and eventually decided against doing so.

In 1983 Loree began a seventeen-year relationship with Marcelle Daniels. During the first nine years of their relationship, they confronted and overcame many challenges as an interracial lesbian couple, and Loree rose to prominence as a lesbian-feminist activist. When Marcelle expressed his desire to transition to male, Loree struggled to understand his new identity and its ramifications on her own. However, she knew that she wasn't willing to have him sacrifice his identity in order to be with her. When Marcelle began physically transitioning, Loree began her own transition – from lesbian-feminist activist to trans activist.

Following Marcelle's transition, Loree was excluded by the lesbian community and marginalized by the female-to-male (FTM) community, which consigned her to the role of supporting her man. This did not sit well with Loree. She took the FTM community to task for its failure to support significant others, families, friends, and allies, waging what came to be known as the SOFFA Wars. In the late 1990s Loree and Marcelle worked with like-minded FTM community members like Michael Munson to organize the inclusive True Spirit conferences.

Loree moved to Milwaukee in 2000, where she and Munson began co-facilitating FORGE, a national education, advocacy, and support organization for FTMs and SOFFAs. As Loree explains, "We structured Milwaukee's transgender community differently on purpose. We wanted a place where the community was all of us and where we weren't divided so strongly by identity." In 2007, FORGE sponsored the first national FTM/SOFFA conference to be held in the Midwest. In 2009 it also became the first trans organization to receive a federal grant. Says Loree, "I've really worked hard to try to move people into places of more caring and respectfulness and humanity."