

History of the International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, Inc.

The International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, Inc., has become known as ICTLEP and The Transgender Law Conference and also as TRANSGEN ____ (the blank is the year of that conference).



It began out of frustration and with the help of grass-roots activists. Much of the frustration is discussed at length in [Chapter 22](#), "Facing Discrimination, Organizing for Freedom: The Transgender Community." In 1991, I was an activist who in 1981 had changed the local law against cross-dressing (which was being used to arrest lesbians in fly-front pants and gays in their bars). I was an OUT and practicing trial attorney in Houston, Texas, and as a result gay and lesbian attorneys were also coming out (the story was that if Phyllis could be out and be successful, then so could they). I was reading the newsletters of various gay and lesbian state and national legal organizations that were NOT covering transgender legal issues. And I was attending regional TG events and saw that most people were interested in passing, but not working towards protecting themselves legally.

In the summer of 1991, during a local Houston fund raiser for the International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE), I met privately with its then Executive Director, Merrissa Sherrill Lynn. I told her of my idea to have an annual meeting devoted solely to developing strategies for progressive change in the law as it effected transgenders. I was offering to work as a committee under the IFGE umbrella, that is, as an IFGE event that would move to different parts of the USA each year and deal with transgender legal issues. She told me that IFGE was not interested.

I was also active with, and a former Director of the Gulf Coast Transgender Community (GCTC) which was, and still is, a Houston group open to ALL members of the transgender spectrum. In the fall of 1991, I ran for Vice-President on the platform of having GCTC sponsor the first transgender legal conference in Houston in 1992. I was elected and several activists from GCTC joined the committee. Unfortunately, I do not remember them all, but I do remember Jackie Thorne, Cynthia Lee, Dee McKellar, Vivian McKenzie and Cynthia Davis were involved in early committee meetings and followed through most of the way.



l-r: Lee, McKellar, Frye, McKenzie Staffed the 1st ICTLEP Conference

These were the days of little fax use. I had not heard of Internet communication. Most of the publicity was gained by placing notices in regional and national meeting mail-outs and in the IFGE "Transgender Tapestry" or Dallas Denny's "Chrysalis" quarterly. While the committee worked, I attended the February 1992 Texas T-Party and the March 1992 IFGE Convention. I must confess, that without those two events, I probably would not have gotten the event off of the ground. Of special and profound help during those days were the T-Party organizers, Cynthia and Linda Phillips. It was through them that I met Tere Prasse (Fredrickson) who is the web mistress of this site. During those two events, and the workshops I was allowed to present, TG lawyer volunteers began to surface.



Tere Prasse

In the workshops and fliers, I let it be known that the GCTC Committee would host a conference in August, 1992, in Houston, Texas, and address the following areas of transgender law – housing, insurance, military, probate and civil commitment, employment, health, anti-discrimination, criminal and family. I knew that I had enough local resources and friends to provide speakers in all of the areas except for military law (no military base within 150 miles), health law (an area that I knew nothing about) and employment law (since LGBT folks had NO protection in Texas). Interestingly, those were the first three areas for with volunteers appeared. Sharon Stuart, a former military JAG officer, approached me as asked if she could please do military law. Guess what I said? Next I received a letter from Martine Rothblatt (then Marla Aspen) who asked if she could present a paper on health

law. At the IFGE event Laura Skaer (then Laura Smiley) asked if she could do a paper on employment law. It was obvious to me that this conference was fated to happen since the three gaps were known to no one but me, not even the committee, but these were the first three speakers to volunteer.

During this time, the name of the conference was not fully settled. Originally it was the Transgender Law Conference. As the committee became more active, we realized, that without employment protection, the rest was only dressing, so we made it the Transgender Law and Employment Policy Conference. Then I received a letter from Stephan Whittle of England, who said if it was an international conference, he could probably secure university funding to attend. Thus International was added to the name. It took me a while to learn how to say ICTLEP.



on the hotel marquee, for all to see during the entire conference

The 1st International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy began at the Hilton, Southwest Freeway, Houston, Texas, on August 28, 1992. We insured that as part of our negotiations with the hotel, the marquee would read, "Welcome Transgender Law Conference." Speakers included several local trial and appellate judges, plus Ray Hill, Sharon Stuart, Keith Smith, Jim Kuhn, David Elliot, Martine Rothblatt, Helen Cassidy, Clyde Williams and Connie Moore. Laura wrote her report for me to present but she was unable to attend. Stephan was also unable to attend. I made arrangements with a local court reporting school for volunteer transcript service and published the *Proceedings* from the 1st Conference. Over fifty folks attended. Between a deposit from GCTC and my credit card, it was a success. GCTC got its money back and my credit card balance was paid. We had a balance for the next year's event.



Cynthia and Linda Phillips

In January 1993, ICTLEP became a Texas not-for-profit corporation. The original Directors were Sharon Stuart, Martine Rothblatt, Laura Skaer, Jackie Thorne and myself. This Board met for the first time at the Texas T-Party in San Antonio in February 1993. The Phillips and the Texas T-Party were some of ICTLEP's staunchest and most generous supporters for many years.



original ICTLEP Board of Directors,
l-r: Rothblatt, Stuart, Frye, Skaer, and Thorne

The 2nd Conference was held in the same hotel on August 26-29, 1993. Tere Prasse became installed as my good right-hand and maintained the data base for the 2nd Conference. She also did the word processing to make the *Proceedings* from the 2nd Conference look polished and professional. Leticia Salas volunteered court reporter services for the transcripts. The speakers were several judges, legislators, law professors and staff attorneys, plus Sharon Kahn, Annise Parker, Laura Skaer, Martine Rothblatt, Daniel Shea, Latisha Frederick, Leslie Feinberg, Keith Stewart, Sharon Stuart, James Kuhn, Ray Hill, Connie Moore, , Sister Mary Elizabeth, Marian Beddill, Yvonne Cook-Riley and Cynthia and Linda Phillips. In addition to the previous areas of law, we added workshops on Documentation Law, Education in Transgender Issues, Intervention Law, Imprisonment Law and the International Bill of Gender Rights.

Significant published reports from this 2nd Conference were the following:

International Bill of Gender Rights

Health Law Standards of Care for Transsexualism

Policy for the Imprisoned, Transgendered

The 2nd Conference was also when we received our plaque. Sydney Clark carved a wooden plaque that came into two pieces for travel. I carted that plaque all over the USA to various TG meetings and conventions and placed it on a tripod for either my workshop presentation, keynote speech or at my vendor booth. That was also the year we got the banner that read "TRANSGENDERED & PROUD! AND WE VOTE!" via Laura Skaer.



carved wooden plaque



Sydney Clark

I began to travel a lot to local and regional and national TG events. Sometimes the organization would bring me in, but usually ICTLEP paid the way. We developed a small but loyal cadre of monthly financial contributors. I carried the plaque, the banner, copies of the two *Proceedings* for sale, and a variety of t-shirts for sale. This was how ICTLEP was financed: I took nothing other than expenses and the office equipment it purchased as in-kind compensation for my time. I began to devote huge amounts of time to this. I fielded calls and letters requesting help. My law practice began to suffer.

The 3rd ICTLEP was at the same hotel in August 1994. During the year between, I had been privileged to address the March on Washington, we carried the banner as we marched to the Capitol, and Karen Kerin and I began the TG legal and political involvement in Washington, D.C. This is all detailed in [Chapter 22](#), "Facing Discrimination, Organizing for Freedom: The Transgender Community." Speakers included Laura Skaer, Dianna Cicotello, Jane Fee, Melinda Whiteway, Jessica Xavier, Karen Kerin, Martine Rothblatt, Michael Hernandez, Cissy Conley (who was awarded the first Transgender Pioneer Award), Sharon Stuart, Dee McKellar, Gordene MacKenzie, Karen and Randall Larimore, and Thomas Heitz. I believe the significance of that conference was that we now had

enough TG professional participation that I did not have to rely on the generous local, non-TG activists who had presented workshops at the first two conferences. It was a maturity.



Stephen Whittle



Jane Fee

Several significant appendices included the groundbreaking, large "n", non-clinical survey of TG folks by Boulton & Park, the brilliant paper by Lisa Middleton on insurance and reimbursement of transgender health care and our being allowed to include a portion of the monumental work of Jamison Green's San Francisco Human Rights Commission report.

In June 1995, we moved hotels, but stayed in Houston for the 4th Conference. It was obvious from all of the travel that I had done to regional and national TG conventions, the word was getting out. Plus, the TG community knew it was being left out of ENDA. This was, for lack of a better term, "the political ICTLEP conference" in that every TG political leader, except for three, were in attendance. (Note that the first national TG lobby event in DC had taken place in March, and Karen Kerin, Riki Wilchins and I were working on the second for October 1995. Also, JoAnna McNamara and I were involved on the Board of the National Lesbian and Gay Law Association – NLGLA – which had resolved that transgenders should be in ENDA.) It was at this 4th ICTLEP Conference, on Thursday night, June 15th, 1995, that we received word that we had been screwed out of the proposed ENDA wording again by HRC.



Dallas Denny



Sarah DePalma and Jessica Xavier)

Aside from the politics, the Bill of Gender Rights was upgraded as

were the Health Law Standards. We received continuing legal education credits from the State Bar of Texas for the fourth year in a row. Our speakers included a judge and law professor, Jane Ellen Fairfax, Stephen Whittle, Lisa Middleton, Martine Rothblatt (no longer an ICTLEP Director), Dallas Denny, Laura Skaer, Lisa Kasner (LA Lisa), Sarah DePalma, Jessica Xavier, Karen Kerin, Gordene MacKenzie, Riki Wilchins, Jane Fee (winner of the Transgender Pioneer Award), Ray Hill (winner of the Transgender Champion Award), Sharon Stuart, Tere Prasse, Evelyn Lindenmuth, Sandra Laframboise, Linda Phillips, Denise Copp, Diana Cicotella and Melinda Whiteway (replacing Jackie Thorne as ICTLEP Director). Laura Skaer had previously resigned as an ICTLEP director and was replaced by Dee McKellar. Mary O'Connor had published the 4th *Proceedings*.



Diana Cicotella



Ray Hill

It was after this conference that the national struggle for TG rights really kicked in. It was also that fall of 1995 that my health went to hell! One week after the October 1995, 2nd National TG Lobby Event in D.C., I collapsed into a week-long crying jag. I was diagnosed with sideroblastic anemia, and told it was mostly stress induced. It was not only a precursor to leukemia (which I still do not have), but it cause horrific depressions. I guess it was a sign of just how much community burden I was carrying in that I began to scale my involvement back, yet most folks did not notice that I was still anything but going full tilt. Well, I was scaling back, and I still am scaling back. The Directors authorized me to move the ICTLEP office out of my house and into an hired office. We also agreed to hire Dee McKellar to work the office.



Bergstedt



Williams

The 5th ICTLEP Conference was held over the July 4th weekend, 1996, at the Braeswood Ramada in Houston. Sharon Stuart drafted a "Declaration of Gender Liberty" which we held as a candlelight service at 10PM on July 4th. It was nice of the city and surrounding shopping malls to provide the fireworks precisely at 10PM as we transgenders gathered on the hotel lawn and declared our liberty. There were several significant workshops held at this conference. We had workshops and plenary reports devoted exclusively to the legal needs of the female to male (FTM) community and to the people of color (POC) community. The legal needs of non-TS transgenders were presented. An extensive report was made on international transgender legal issues, and the history of same-sex marriages was presented. Marie Gallagher and Mary O'Connor published the 5th *Proceedings* in which the index to all five volumes was placed. Speakers included Mary Coombs, Elvia Arriola, Stephen Whittle, Deborah Brady, Jackie Thorne, Jane Ellen Fairfax, Jennifer Ellsworth, Stephen Whittle, Jamison Green, Sandy Kasten (now an ICTLEP Director), Spencer Bergstedt (now an ICTLEP Director), Dana Turner (later an ICTLEP Director), Shannon Minter, Martine Rothblatt, Lisa Middleton, Ted Switzer, and Malcolm Williams.



Dana Turner



Green

The sixth and last conference was held in the summer of 1997. It was a terrific conference. Kerry Lobel, Executive Director of NGLTF, was the Keynoter, and Reg Jones, Commissioner of the Equal

Employment Opportunity Commission, both spoke. We continued into the areas of FTM and POC and non-TS legal needs. Unfortunately, I was still not doing well medically, plus I was burning out from six annual conferences. The volunteer court reporters quit in the middle of the event. Shortly after that conference Dee McKellar died of a heart attack. A *Proceedings* was attempted from the audio tapes, and several volunteers worked on them. There is a possibility that after this web site is completed, I may go into that transcribed work and see if I can place some of the workshop transcripts into this web site.



Middleton



Yosenio Lewis

Another reason that ICTLEP was running out of steam was that most of its reasons for being had been achieved. The legal needs of the transgender community was now moving on both a national, and grassroots level. ICTLEP had given birth to It's Time America (ITA) several years back, which has spawned other organizations. And much of the conference work of ICTLEP has been assumed by the NLGLA. After several years, the NLGLA Board amended its bylaws to be fully transgender and bisexual inclusive. Its web site (www.nlgl.org) and its annual Lavender Law Conferences have a variety of workshops and panels that are TG inclusive. Many of its Board are out TG lawyers and in 1998-1999 a TG lawyers served as one of its co-chairs, Melinda Whiteway. Sharon Stuart has taken ICTLEP into a stasis and keeps it alive if it is needed again.



Melinda Whiteway



Shannon Minter

In all, I am proud of what ICTLEP did. It focused us on the needs of having a national TG legal and political momentum, and was instrumental in creating that momentum. It trained many grassroots

and national TG political and legal leaders who have trained others. ICTLEP created ITA which still exists in the form of some active state chapters and which has spawned other grassroots activist organizations. It assembled TG lawyers and lay people into six annual conferences and published five annual *Proceedings*. It carried the International Bill of Gender Rights to completion and also published a Health Law Standard of Care and a Policy for the Imprisoned Transgendered. It worked with the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR's Shannon Minter) to combat the Gender Identity Disorder listing in the DSM. ICTLEP placed many of its people and ideas into the NLGLA which continues its work in the annual Lavender Law Conferences.

It brought a lot of TG lawyers out of the closet.

Phyllis Randolph Frye

