

# YOUR SOFFA VOICE

Volume 1, Issue 1

December 1, 1998

## Editor's Note

I was very excited when Loree Cook-Daniels, National SOFFA Coordinator for American Boyz, suggested that I produce this newsletter. SOFFA issues have long been a passion of mine. Even then, I had a picture in my mind of what this newsletter would look like. I knew that announcements, resources, contact names and the like were a given, but I wanted to include letters, stories, personal revelations, and even poems from you. I dreamed of having a newsletter that was both informational and personal offering resources, support and the knowledge that you are not alone out there. In order to achieve this goal, I need submissions from you. Let your SOFFA voice be heard! Send any personal stories, articles, poems, essays, letters, comments, etc. to either of the following addresses:

Email: [SOFFAUSA@aol.com](mailto:SOFFAUSA@aol.com) or

postal mail:

Jodi Burchell, Editor

P.O. Box 1916

Smyrna, TN. 37167

~jodi

## As Ready As A Mother Could Be

By Mary Boenke

*Our middle offspring, a long-time lesbian, came out to us three years ago -- for the second time-- as a transsexual. After a few weeks of hoping this was just a phase that would pass (denial?), and feeling upset that s/he would not continue daily emails answering all my questions (anger?), I quickly came to realize I was just going through those familiar old "stages of grief" and I had better get to the acceptance stage quickly -- and I did.*

*So, how does a mother get to acceptance, and even activism, so quickly? I was extraordinarily lucky to have had many experiences that made it relatively easy. I've been a Unitarian for 45 years, and have long firmly believed that EVERYone has a right to self-identify and that NO one has the right to judge another's identity. I'm a social worker and have learned to accept and enjoy working with ALL kinds of people. I am also a chronic rabble-rouser, and have worked on many social justice issues. I had been an active PFLAG (Parent, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) chapter organizer for five years and knew very well the stages of grief so many parents struggle through.*

*Finally, I had been dismayed to learn of the bias within the gay community toward bi-sexuals, had done some reading and speaking on that topic, had actually also attended some PFLAG Transgender workshops and told some friends, "And next year I'm going to learn more about this 'transgender thing'!" At that time, I hadn't a clue that we, ourselves, would be confronted with this issue.*

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# Why Trans SOs of FTMs Need SO Support

- by Arthur Freeheart

Non-trans SOs of FTMs often have very limited awareness of trans issues before their partner(s) come out as trans or they become romantically involved with transperson(s). A large part of SO experience can be deciding how you feel about transness, transition, partner gender, and potential relationship implications.

At first glance, it may seem as if trans SOs of FTMs have those bases covered and have no need of SO of FTM support. Trans SOs of FTMs often grapple with those issues too.

The heart of SO experience is day-to-day life with partner transition or partner presentation as a man or gender variant person. That's challenging no matter what your gender!

Trans SOs of FTMs are usually as hard pressed to find forums in which they can talk about their relationships as non-trans partners of FTMs are. Currently, there are no fully developed resources or "spaces" specifically for trans SOs of FTMs.

One trans SO of an FTM has expressed feeling "out of place" in mixed SO chats because of the basic difference in gender perspective between women SOs & transmen SOs. He's raised the idea of specialized "FTM SOs of FTMs" chats. If enough FTM SOs of FTMs want something similar, we'll give it a whirl!

My hope is that trans/non-trans, female/male/other SOs can share "mixed" spaces. That will require mutual courtesy, openness, tolerance, and respect. We have too much in common, as SOs of FTMs, to honestly label another SO "other" or "outsider."

*Arthur Freeheart is the American Boyz Gay/Bi FTMs & SOs Liason*

## BY THE WAY....

This sample newsletter is available via email or in print version to those without access to electronic communication. To receive a print version, send SASE to Jodi Burchell, Editor at: PO Box 1916, Smyrna, TN 37167. Email: [SOFFAUSA@aol.com](mailto:SOFFAUSA@aol.com).

All donations are greatly appreciated to help provide materials and postage.

To receive future issues, complete the subscription form on page 7.

# Southern Comfort Conference

- by Jodi Burchell

S.C.C. was wonderful this year! Sometimes I wish life was a constant gender conference. Imagine that, all day connecting with trans people and their SOFFA's. For many of us, even having one person and their SO in the same city would be a blessing.

Among the many different seminars concerning all aspects of transitioning, there were two SOFFA seminars facilitated by Dr. Sandra Cole, Director of the University of Michigan Comprehensive Gender Services Program. Much to my delight, the SOFFA seminars were scheduled for a total of seven hours of meeting time. Believe me, all seven hours were needed and appreciated. As most of us are aware, many SOs feel that our issues and needs are pushed back, ignored, or forgotten when one of our guys is transitioning. Transitioning is a big deal, but being a partner and being supportive and having our needs met is important as well.

Most of the issues shared and discussed in the meetings were not new to me. Issues like fear of the future, how our own identities may be affected by our partner's transition, and fear of isolation or rejection from our current friends, family, or other support systems. We also discussed things like setting and maintaining boundaries, shame, and safety. None of these issues were surprising to me. It was absolutely heart-wrenching and glorious at the same time to hear and see some of these SOs shed their tears and feel that safe and be vulnerable, to share their pain, and talk about their innermost feelings.

The message that Dr. Cole left with us was very important. I really needed to hear it. What Dr. Cole wanted us to remember is that our needs as SOs are very important. Many of us are caretakers and push back our needs and focus on our partners and family. It's so important for us to be gentle on ourselves and to get what we need. She also stressed the importance of having an objective person help us sort through and deal with these issues, whether they be personal or relationship oriented. If it affects us, then it's important! None of us should feel guilty or selfish by asking for what we need. It was music to my ears!!! ♦



# AMBOYZ SOFFA CONTACTS

## National SOFFA Coordinator:

Loree Cook-Daniels: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

## Local SOFFA Coordinators:

-New York City: Natalie: Email: [REDACTED]

-Tennessee: Tracy: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

-Minnesota: Beth: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

-Arizona: Debra: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

-Toronto: Kaia: [REDACTED] FAX: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

-San Antonio, TX: Debra: [REDACTED]  
(leave msg on answering machine):

Email: [REDACTED]

-Richard Brown in Delaware, (gay man, tg ally): Delaware: Richard Brown: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

## We also have SOFFAs serving in regular positions:

-Lee Smith, Midsouth Coordinator, is a SOFFA and also the Online Outreach Coordinator:

PO Box 118, New Haven, KY, 40051

Email: [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

-Arlene Sandoval-Guerra is the Southeast Region Spanish-speaking Liason (ally): Latino/a Issues: (Se Habla Español)

Email: [REDACTED]

## The following special contacts are also SOFFAs:

-Legal Issues: Phyllis Randolph Frye, Esq: [REDACTED] (lawyer and transwoman)

-Medical Issues: Dr Kathryn Thomas, PhD, RN: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] (gender therapist)

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Another factor, which may have actually "helped", in an ironic sort of way, was that our other son was undergoing severe treatment for an acute, life-threatening leukemia. Compared to that, accepting a transsexual child, was a little easier. At least that illness kept things in perspective and we were not free to worry full-time about Allen's coming transition. (Nor, as it turned out, could we worry full-time about the leukemia, and that son is also now healthy and happy.)

Finally, I had the extreme good fortune to have, within PFLAG, a wonderful support community, with whom I could air my fears and feelings, and a very supportive, loving husband. As you can see, I was extremely lucky; I was, indeed, "as ready as a mother could be" to deal with her child's transsexuality. So, don't be too hard on your own parents, if they are having a hard time understanding and accepting you. They probably aren't Unitarians, social workers, PFLAG organizers, social justice activists, experienced in handling parental grief, nor already have a pre-disposition to learning about trans issues!

The PFLAG support did not just happen. Most of us in that wonderful organization knew almost nothing about transgender/transsexual issues. Shortly after Allen came out to us, I attended the 1995 annual PFLAG convention in Indianapolis; I went looking for other parents and friends with a like interest, and found them. Following an excellent Transgender Workshop, led by Annie Johnson, a local transgenderist, a handful of us pulled our chairs out into in the hallway and began organizing what soon became T-SON, PFLAG's Transgender Special Outreach Network. Luckily, one of the mothers was a computer whiz and soon had us all subscribed to a new list called TGS-PFLAG, which became my life-line. I didn't even know what questions to ask or where to ask them, so I lurked a lot, listening to over a hundred T-folks and parents talking to each other. I was even on-line in my other son's hospital room during his bone marrow transplant!

Since then a great deal has happened, both in the life of our new son, Allen, and within TSON. Allen went through the prescribed process - support group, counseling, hormone shots a man, and then some surgery, including both a hysterectomy and breast reduction. It was when his voice dropped that we realized we needed to accept the new male name..

That was hard enough, but the male pronouns were much more difficult to adopt. As a mother, I had changed his diapers

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hundreds of times, knew and loved that female body just as it was. The male pronouns seemed so definite and so specifically male. Nothing in my past had prepared me for the new pronouns. Practice, constant effort, and commitment to "staying with" the process were needed. I still slip up occasionally, but both Allen and I have agreed to forgive me when this happens. All of my "lucky" background helped me accept the transgender "concept." But when it comes down to practical issues, we mothers are probably all alike in our struggle to relearn and change.

Meanwhile, TSON was growing rapidly. Through our on-line network we began to find other families of trans persons all around the country. We identified a Transgender Coordinator (Tcord) in most PFLAG regions, and eventually one in over 170 chapters. Each of these persons is responsible for learning something about the issues, helping to educate their chapter, networking with their local trans community (if there is one), and making sure the chapter is welcoming to any transgenders, or their family members, who attend.

With Nancy Sharp and Jessica Xavier, chief author, we wrote an introductory booklet, called "Our Trans Children" and have now sold over 12,000 copies. We put out an occasional newsletter, and we requested that national PFLAG change the Mission Statement in the by-laws so as to become transgender-inclusive.

In September 1998, at the organization's annual meeting, the vote was nearly unanimous for inclusion. That was a moment I'll never forget. The sea of hands raised to vote "yes", the cheers and prolonged applause that followed, and our own little celebration that evening are all etched in my heart.

I have been fortunate, indeed, to have had so much preparation for this newest challenge, and especially, to have a son who chose to be true to himself, honest with us, and to introduce us to the whole new and wondrous world of transgenderism. ♦

~For email information and support, send the message—subscribe TGS-FLAG (and your email address)—to:

listproc@Youth-Guard.org or contact the list owner at:

For questions, comments, or to volunteer with TSON, please contact Mary Boenke at: [redacted] or email: [redacted] Transgender education is needed everywhere!!~

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### ~NEW EMAIL LIST

American Boyz is pleased to announce its co-sponsorship of a new email list, trans-soffa-activists.

This list is designed to provide support, networking, and resource sharing to "soffas" (significant others, family, friends, and allies) of transsexual, transgendered, and intersex persons who are -- or wish to be -- actively providing advocacy, education, training, or support services to or on behalf of the transsexual/transgender/intersex communities.

Soffas connected to both FTM and MTF transsexual/transgender/intersex persons are welcome, as are trans/intersex persons who wish to support soffas activists.

Further information about the list, and a sign-up opportunity, are available by emailing one of the list's co-administrators, [redacted] or [redacted]

American Boyz is a national, grassroots organization for F2Ms and Soffas. Its website is  
<<http://www.netgsi.com/~listwrangler>>.

### ~NEW SOFFA WEBSITE

Resources for SOFFA's of any type of transgendered person:  
<http://members.aol.com/SOFFAUSA/index.html>

If you know of any informational SOFFA-related resources for the website, please EMAIL them to: [SOFFAUSA@aol.com](mailto:SOFFAUSA@aol.com)

NOTE: Please send any SOFFA-related announcements for future newsletters to: Jodi Burchell, Editor  
PO Box 1916  
Smyrna, TN 37167

Or email:  
[SOFFAUSA@aol.com](mailto:SOFFAUSA@aol.com)



# WHAT SOs FORGET THEY HAVE THE RIGHT TO

-by Michelle King

*As an SO of an FTM, I have come to realize that all of us who support someone going through transition forget that we too...are going through a tough time in our own life. We and the one's we support forget that we are human beings and as such, we have very important rights. So...I've come up with a few...PERSONAL BILL OF RIGHTS...that we need to remember to give ourselves and others.*

- \* I have the right to put myself first at times and to recognize that my needs are as important as the needs of others.*
- \* I have the right to make periodic mistakes, to "mess up," or not always live up to expectations of others.*
- \* I have the right to express my own opinions, preferences, and feelings; and feel they are as legitimate as the attitudes of others.*
- \* I have the right to stand up for myself and protest unfair treatment from others.*
- \* I have the right to terminate conversations with others who try to humiliate, embarrass, or belittle me.*
- \* I have the right to occasionally say NO and declare to others what I can and cannot do without feeling like I'm letting someone down.*
- \* I have the right to ask for assistance or emotional support from others without feeling like I'm being weak or not carrying my fair share of the load.*
- \* I have the right to take time for myself in ways that allow me to relax, "chill out," or pursue personal interests.*
- \* I have the right to not to be PERFECT.*
- \* I have the right to find healthy ways to reduce or eliminate some of the stresses in my life.*
- \* I have the right to not be all things to all people at all times.*
- \* I have the right to be responsible for my own feelings, but not the feelings of others if I disagree or go against the grain of what others expect.*
- \* I have the right to enjoy my life in the here and now and not feel like I have to wait for the "good times" to come.*
- \* I have the right to make positive changes in my life, even if at times it inconveniences others.*
- \* I have the right to "rock the boat" without feeling like its going to capsize.*
- \* I have the right to pursue ALL the above mentioned right without feeling like I'm being a bad or unworthy person!*

*If you as a person feel that you don't have any of the above rights for whatever reason, think about this....*

*While you are attending to the needs and whims of employers, parents, spouses, children, friends, teachers, relatives, committee members and community expectations, don't forget to carve out a niche of time to meet your own personal needs. If you get too far out of "balance" with your life priorities, because of being overly attentive to the needs of others, your body begins to react and develops its own brand of symptoms. Until finally, you HAVE to give to yourself. As the old saying goes, take care of yourself, no one else will.*

*And above all of the other rights, you have the right to be a happy, healthy human being!*

*One more thing, remember that "NO" is a statement in itself, and you should never feel that you have to explain why you tell anyone "NO." ♦*

## American Boyz

*American Boyz is a support and social group for people who were born female but who feel that is not a complete or accurate assessment of who they are and our significant others, friends, family, and allies (SOFFAs). Our membership includes Butches, FTMs, Transmen, FTV's, Gender Outlaws, Transexals, Drag Kings, Boychicks, She-Bears, Shapeshifters, Tomboys, Passing Women, Amazons, Intersexuals, Female Guys, Boss Girls, Transgenderists, Sirs, and our SOFFAs. We provide: education, support, social events, newsletters, online forums, local meetings, political action, and a national conference.*

*To learn more about The American Boyz, send email to [majordomo@netgsi.com](mailto:majordomo@netgsi.com) with the message 'info amboyz' in the body of the email, and it will automatically return the 'Welcome and Info' article with more detailed information about our online resources.*

*Or send email to [listwrangler@netgsi.com](mailto:listwrangler@netgsi.com)*

*Or send SASE to: The American Boyz, PO Box 1118, Elkton, MD, 21922-1118*



## POETRY

*loving queer*

*I want hir near me*

*in my open arms*

*I offer hir refuge*

*I give myself*

*over*

*to hir embrace*

*I love hir ways*

*how s/he moves*

*through hir days*

*how s/he lives*

*in the gray zone*

*this is clear to me;*

*I love hir*

*the butch, the gentleman lover*

*the dual self;*

*conflicting, coexisting*

*resolved and finding resolution*

*finding voice in hir art;*

*words, music*

*I give myself to hir*

*I want to*

*know the wealth of hir*

*mind and body, soul*

*I want to understand*

*the hell of being hir*

*in this world*

*and the joy that also comes*

*from living outside simple lines*

-Sonya Lorenzo, copyright 1998

## ANNOUNCEMENT:

### True Spirit Conference, 1999

The American Boyz are pleased to announce the Third Annual True Spirit Conference to be held at the Best Western Maryland Inn in Laurel, Maryland from February 26 - 28, 1999. This three day conference focuses on the social, physical, emotional, spiritual and relational health of all gender variant people on the FTM spectrum and their significant others, friends, families, and allies.

Workshops and panel presentations to be held during this 3rd annual event address such topics as: health and transition issues, relationships, special needs populations, law, politics, employment, and spirituality. True Spirit 1999 is committed to offering inclusive programming for young people, people of color and elders. Special workshops and caucus opportunities will be available for service providers. Featured speakers include Jude Patton, long term ftm and health advocate, Kitten Gross, family and trans youth advocate, and Dr. Michael L. Brownstein, M.D., FACS, ftm surgeon, as well as many others.

Other events of note scheduled for True Spirit 1999 are: authors readings and chat sessions, exhibit hall with information and merchandise, film festival, and the American Boys Award Ceremony.

Conference registration fee ranges from \$60 - \$80 with work scholarship and housing assistance available on a first come first serve basis. However, those registering before January 1, 1999 will enjoy a \$20 discount on their registration fee. There are two options for registration: one, download and complete registration form from the Internet at [www.netgsi.com/~listwrangler](http://www.netgsi.com/~listwrangler) or two, request a conference flyer from The American Boyz/True Spirit 1999 at P. O. Box 1118, Elkton, MD, 21922-1118.

True Spirit will, for the third year, provide the only annual east coast conference event for people of transgender experience, including but not limited to tomboys, butches, f2ms, transmen, drag kings, masculine females, crossdressers, intersexuals, and those who support us, including our Significant Others, Friends, Families and Allies (SOFFAs).

NOTE: American Boyz is a sponsor of 'Your SOFFA VOICE' and values the role SOFFA's play in the lives of trans people. True Spirit Conference is for SOFFA's too!  
~Editor

## PERSONAL ADS

'Your SOFFA VOICE' is now accepting personal ads for future issues. All ads should be no longer than 30 words. All correspondence should be sent c/o 'Your SOFFA VOICE' and will be forwarded unless otherwise specified. Personal ads are free for a limited time and will only be posted in one issue.



## ADVERTISING RATES

**BUSINESS CARD ADS**  
**\$10.00/ISSUE OR \$50.00/YEAR**

**FOR OTHER RATES,  
CONTACT:**

**'Your SOFFA VOICE'**  
c/o Jodi Burchell, Editor  
PO Box 1916  
Smyrna, TN 37167

**OR EMAIL:**  
**SOFFAUSA@AOL.COM**

Contacts..(cont. from page 3)

-Family Issues: Mary Boenke; Email:  
[REDACTED] (parent of tg)  
-Official Jewish Mother: Leslie Ann  
Alpert; Email: [REDACTED]  
(ally)

If you think you'd like to be an  
AmBoyz local, regional, or SOFFA  
contact, see the American Boyz  
website,

<http://www.netqsi.com/~listwrangler>  
for a "job description" and then  
contact national SOFFA  
coordinator, Loree Cook-Daniels,  
at:

[REDACTED]  
or American Boyz's Coordinator-  
in-Chief, Gary Bowen, at:  
[REDACTED]

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