

A Day of Remembrance

Contributed by Rebecca Secrest
Friday, 16 November 2007

November 20 marks a significant day for the GLBT and ally communities; it is the Ninth Annual Transgender Day of Remembrance. The movement was founded by Gwendolyn Ann Smith to commemorate Rita Hester, a trans-woman who was brutally murdered in her Boston apartment in 1998. Smith's group held a candlelight vigil in San Francisco in 1999, this is seen as the first official year of the Transgender Day of Remembrance.

Trans-gendered people feel that the gender they were assigned at birth does not correspond with their gender identity. To remedy this dissonance they may cross-dress, take hormone therapy regimens, or even have gender-switching surgeries. These actions tend to confuse many individuals. Unfortunately, sometimes trans-people are viewed as 'threats to society' or as bad people, and are violently attacked and/or murdered.

Especially unfortunate is the fact that trans-violence often goes unreported in the media, or if a murder is mentioned the person's first sexual identity will be made prominent with their trans-name put in quotation marks, for example: 'John Smith, also known as 'Rita Smith' was murdered today';

This is very disrespectful. Also, on the Day of Remembrance website there is a list of trans-gender murders that includes two victims named Maribelle Reyes and Victoria Arelland. These two trans-women were denied proper AIDS therapies because they were transgendered, and died as a result.

Another horrific story involves a trans-woman named Tyra Henderson, who was murdered in Washington D.C. in 2000. Her family insisted that her hair be cut, and that she be dressed in a suit and tie for her burial. It is impossible to harshly judge a family in a state of grief, but this action feels unconscionable.

The Transgender Day of Remembrance movement hopes to accomplish three things: to raise awareness of hate crimes in general, to allow non-transgender people a chance to show their support for the transgender community, and to have the day serve as a memorial service for those who would otherwise be forgotten. It is meant to be a celebration of diversity, and an affirmation that trans-individuals, although they may not be easily understood by those living outside, are just as worthy of life as those engaged in 'normal' life-styles.

References: www.genderadvocates.org