**“The Many Shades of ‘Out’”: Washington DC, June 13, 2013**

On a sultry June afternoon as my husband and I strolled towards the White House East Entrance, I reflected back on my gender transition, decades before in 1968.

Shamed as a social outcast, I'd lost my family, my friends and all social support. I'd been fired by IBM, and lost a promising research career. In many places, I could have been arrested as a sex offender – or institutionalized in a mental hospital and forced to undergo electroshock therapy, or worse.

Evading those fates, I finished my transition and began building a career in a secret new identity, at the bottom of the ladder as a contract programmer. Any 'outing' could have led to media exposure, and I'd have become unemployable and on the streets for good. Deep fear channeled my life into 'stealth-mode.' For over 30years I covered my past, always looking over my shoulder, as if a foreign spy in my own country.

But this was now 2013, and what a contrast it was. My husband Charlie and I were about to join the President's White House Reception to celebrate LGBT Pride Month. The atmosphere was full of joy and hope. As we waited for the President, I reflected further.

I had been 'out' for 15 years now, or so I'd thought: out on the web to inform colleagues about my past . . . out as an advocate for transgender people . . . out as an activist against the psychiatric-pathologization of gender variance.

It was one thing to hide in back-rooms at Xerox Palo Alto Research Center decades ago, launching innovations as the hidden-hand behind the VLSI microelectronics revolution in Silicon Valley. . . a revolution that's changed the world forever.

I didn't mind being almost invisible in my field back then, or that no one had a clue what I was really doing, much less who was doing it. I was thrilled to even have a job.

But 'out' has many shades of grey -- and even in recent years I’d kept on partly covering, shyly holding back, lingering in the shadows. Although times had changed, I'd clung onto old habits.

Down through the years no one could explain how the VLSI revolution actually happened. The results were simply taken for granted. Though I'd gained vital knowledge about generating such engineering paradigm shifts, I feared my history would loom large, obscuring any attempts at explanation.

It wasn't till 2012 that I finally got up the nerve to publish a career memoir, to begin telling the story of how the revolution came about . . .

As the president entered the room, I glanced around and took in the joyful vibes. As he began to speak, I grasped the reality of how far we'd come. A fresh wind was sweeping through our society, especially amongst the younger generations.

Then I thought of the millions of other LGBT people out there. I tried to envision the enormity of lifelong struggles against stigmatization and ostracism, of losses of families and employment, of their oppression by having to 'cover', often not fully engaging life nor being known for who they were, what they'd done, who they loved or who loved them.

In a flash, I visualized the vastness of “The Many Shades of ‘Out’”down through time . . . and it hit me . . . We've come so far, so fast, that ever so many others could begin shedding old habits too.

After all, freedom isn't just an external concept, framed by our laws. It's a gift of the spirit we must give ourselves . . . in this case by going towards brighter shades of 'out'.