**The Many Shades of ‘Out’, by Lynn Conway (read aloud):**

On a sultry June afternoon, as my husband and I walked towards the White House, I reflected back on my gender transition, in 1968.

Shamed as a social outcast, I'd lost my family, friends and all social support. Fired by IBM, I’d lost a promising research career. In many cities I could’ve been arrested, or worse yet, put in a mental hospital.

Evading those fates, I completed my transition, took on a secret new identity, and started all over as a contract programmer. Any 'outing' and I'd have become unemployable and on the streets for good. Fear channeled me into 'stealth-mode‘. For over 30 years I covered my past, always looking over my shoulder, as if a spy in my own country.

But it was now June 13, 2013. What a contrast. My husband Charlie and I with many other advocates were joining the President's White House Reception for LGBT Pride Month. The air was full of joy. As we awaited the President, I reflected further.

I’d been 'out' for 15 years by now, or so I'd thought: out on the Internet to reveal my past to colleagues, out as an advocate for trans people and an activist against psychiatry’s pathologization of gender variance.

It was one thing to hide in the back-rooms of Xerox Palo Alto Research Center decades before, launching innovations as the hidden-hand behind the VLSI microelectronics revolution. I didn't mind being invisible in my field back then, or that no one had a clue what I was doing . . . Or 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 kept on partly covering, shyly holding back, lingering in the darker shadows. Although times had changed, I'd clung to old habits.

Down through the decades no one could explain how the VLSI revolution actually happened. The results were simply taken for granted. Although I'd gained vital knowledge about generating such engineering paradigm shifts, I feared my personal history would loom large in folk's minds, and obscure attempts at explanation. It wasn't till 2012 that I got up the nerve to publish a career memoir, and begin telling the story of how the VLSI 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 how far we'd come. Times had more than changed: a fresh wind was sweeping through our society, especially amongst younger generations.

Then I thought of the millions of LGBT people out there. I tried to envision the 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 saw the vastness of the suffering down through time. Then it hit me: we've come so far, so fast, that now many others could begin uncovering too! After all, freedom isn't just an external concept framed by our laws. It's a gift of the spirit that we must give ourselves, by going towards brighter shades of 'out'.