**The Many Shades of ‘Out’, by Lynn Conway:**

On a sultry June afternoon as my husband and I walked towards the White House, I reflected back on my gender transition in ’68.

Shamed as a social outcast, I'd lost family, friends and all social support. Fired by IBM, I’d lost a promising research career. In many cities I could be arrested, or worse yet, institutionalized.

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 . . .

So, fear channeled me into 'stealth-mode‘. And for over 30 years I covered my past, living as if I was a spy in my own country.

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

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

When I was hidden 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 . . . I was thrilled to even have a job.

But 'out' has many shades of grey -- and even in recent years I kept on shyly holding back, covering 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 paradigm shifts, I feared my personal history would loom large in folk's minds and obscure any attempt at explanation.

And it wasn't till 2012 that I got up the nerve to publish a memoir to begin revealing 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 other LGBT people out there. I tried to envision their lifelong struggles against ostracism, their losses of families and employment, their oppression by having to 'cover', while not 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 . . . Then it hit me: we've come so far so fast that many others could now 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'.