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# Black, White, and All Colours in Between

## To Whom Do You Owe Allegiance?

by Loree Cook-Daniels

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I will teach him to be who he is ... they will not know what to do with my son.

**M**y son, they say, will have to choose. Black or white. All the papers he will face will only offer those boxes. All his friends will want to know. To whom do you owe allegiance? Are you black or are you white? Are you with us or against us?

*... some people believe different means dangerous, and become dangerous in the face of difference*

The answers are both and neither. More and less. The boxes, the questions, leave no ground for honouring the Native American great-great-great-grandmother.

They leave no space for a Jewish heritage gifted by a mother who did not also give him D.N.A. They do not admit the possibility of joining sperm from northern gene pools with an egg from bloodstreams sourced in many soils.

They do not acknowledge that we are all so much more than 'race'. They do not acknowledge my son.

Choose, they all tell me. One chorus wants him successful: hard driving, competitive achiever. One chorus wants him sensitive: privilege-renouncing supporter of women. One chorus wants him a warrior: fearless fighter for his people's rights.

What future, they all demand of me, will you prepare this brown-skinned man-child for? Will he be one of us, or one of the 'other'?

Both, I say, and neither. I will not prepare my son for any war. Dead and wounded crowd the streets already. Someone must start the peace. Someone must stop teaching children the lines, pointing out who belongs on each side. Someone must start the listening, teach children to hear pain where others see anger. Someone must start showing children that every single one of us belongs.

They say I am ignorant. They cannot imagine life without enemies. They cannot imagine my son.

They will all tell my son to choose silence. Some will tell him his father could not have birthed him into the world. Some will tell him his parents turned traitor. None of them want him saying that men don't always have penises, that little girls don't always grow up to be women. They do not want to hear that his parents refuse to stay within any of others' lines. They will tell him he is confused.

I will point out the confusion. I will show him that some people are afraid of what they do not know. I will tell him that some people believe different means dangerous, and become dangerous in the face of difference. I will teach him not to be what they expect, not to fear or condemn in return. I will teach him to trust his own truths. I will raise him to be all that the universe needs, teacher and student, healer and healed.

I will teach him to be who he is.

They will not know what to do with my son.

### Loree Cook-Daniels

From Wisconsin L.G.B.T. History Project website:  As a civil rights activist, Loree Cook-Daniels is engaged with several issues, including aging, public policy, and L.G.B.T. rights. In her early twenties Loree helped organize the historic 1979 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. The march was the first of its kind, drawing approximately 100,000 people who demanded equal civil rights for gays and lesbians. It was also one of the first times that Loree was exposed to transgender identity and issues. During the planning stages, organizers debated whether to include trans people in the march's platform and name, and eventually decided against doing so.



In 1983 Loree began a seventeen-year relationship with Marcelle Daniels. During the first nine years of their relationship, they confronted and overcame many challenges as an interracial lesbian couple, and Loree rose to prominence as a lesbian-feminist activist. When Marcelle expressed his desire to transition to male, Loree struggled to understand his new identity and its

ramifications on her own. However, she knew that she wasn't willing to have him sacrifice his identity in order to be with her. When Marcelle began physically transitioning, Loree began her own transition – from lesbian-feminist activist to trans activist.

Following Marcelle's transition, Loree was excluded by the lesbian community and marginalized by the female-to-male (F.T.M.) community, which consigned her to the role of supporting her man. This did not sit well with Loree. She took the F.T.M. community to task for its failure to support significant others, families, friends, and allies, waging what came to be known as the S.O.F.F.A. Wars. In the late 1990s Loree and Marcelle worked with like-minded F.T.M. community members like Michael Munson to organize the inclusive True Spirit conferences. Loree moved to Milwaukee, U.S.A. in 2000, where she and Munson began co-facilitating F.O.R.G.E., a national education, advocacy, and support organization for F.T.M.s and S.O.F.F.A.s. As Loree explains, "We structured Milwaukee's transgender community differently on purpose. We wanted a place where the community was all of us and where we weren't divided so strongly by identity." In 2007, F.O.R.G.E. sponsored the first national F.T.M./ S.O.F.F.A. conference to be held in the U.S. Midwest. In 2009 it also became the first trans organization to receive a federal grant. Says Loree, "I've really worked hard to try to move people into places of more caring and respectfulness and humanity."

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