



MARSHA BOTZER

**“THE WAY TO BE HAPPY IS TO
HELP MAKE OTHERS SO.”**

Marsha Botzer’s pioneering journey comes down to a single gesture—a raised closed hand. And it’s not so much a fist. Her graceful fingers are joined not to signal defiance, but alliance. It’s her guiding philosophy. As Washington’s most renowned trans activist, Botzer has embraced a belief that nothing is as rewarding as people working together for a goal bigger than themselves. It’s why she founded the Ingersoll Gender Center, joined so many affinity groups in the last four decades, proved herself on so many committees, and like a missionary, shared her story with audiences from Brussels to Beijing. It goes like this:

After Queen Anne High School, Class of 1965, and before she learned anything about gender identity or transitions, Botzer went into construction work. She got swept up in the possibilities of solidarity among the plumbers and pipefitters in her local union. On a trip to Europe, she took in the historic Paris street-protests of 1968 and made her way to Venice where, among a circle of hippies, she overheard a few life-changing words. Back in the states, she returned to hard labor. She called doctors about the idea of what we now call gender confirmation care. Some hung up on her.

To help others with similar struggles, back in the days before Chaz Bono tangoed on “Dancing with the Stars” and Amy Schneider set records on *Jeopardy!* Botzer created the Ingersoll Gender Center in Seattle to offer support services. She spent summer vacations as a guide for people having transition surgeries in a historic Colorado mining town called Trinidad. She rose to the top of prominent LGBTQ groups, including the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and Obama Pride 2008.

It’s almost exhausting to consider her credentials, never mind the 400 hours

Facing page: In decades of award-winning activism, Botzer has learned this: “When it’s won, it isn’t.”
Washington State LGBTQ Commission



Marsha Botzer flashes her signature gesture of solidarity at Seattle's Pride Parade. *Ed Murray*

of personal electrolysis she endured, well over 2500 consecutive weeks (and counting) Ingersoll's support group has met, and her role at 75 as co-chair of Washington state's relatively new LGBTQ Commission.

The deliberate and philosophical Botzer accidentally discovered her favorite quote. It's by Robert Ingersoll, who lived in the 19th century and had nothing to do with gender issues, as far as she knows. It goes: "The time to be happy is now. The place to be happy is here. And the way to be happy is to help make others so."

There was a time when people couldn't find therapists to discuss their sense of being a different gender than the one assigned at birth. Botzer went back to school to earn a master's degree in clinical psychology so she could assist them. There was a time when those feelings were not recognized by the medical establishment. The American Psychiatric Association now describes gender dysphoria as the "psychological distress that results from an incongruence between one's sex assigned at birth and one's gender identity."

Now, identity is acknowledged. Now, therapy abounds. Fortune 500 companies tout their anti-discrimination policies for trans employees. President Joe Biden chose Rachel Levine as his assistant secretary of health—the highest post in federal government attained by a trans person.

But Levine still faced what Senator Patty Murray called "ideological and harmful misrepresentations" in her 2021 confirmation hearings. And that was just the spear tip of a right-wing thrust. When arch-conservatives knew the marriage-equality battle was lost, they pivoted, says Sasha Issenberg, author of *The Engagement*, a history of the strategic battles over same-sex marriage. "Religious conservatives had lost their position of strength for a variety of reasons—opinion change, demographic changes. And then they decided that they were going to go to trans issues instead."

In 2022, their offensive swept across states in a historic wave of bills that would restrict rights, curtail gender studies, and investigate families with trans children for child abuse. Trans people remain the "bete noire" to many, Botzer says. And one thing she has learned in her activism is: "When it's won, it isn't."



Botzer founded the Ingersoll Gender Center in 1977. Medical research 45 years later concludes that gender identity “is not a pathology, or crazy,” she says. “It’s diversity.” *Ingersoll Gender Center*

DISPARAGING TRANS people became a litmus test for GOP candidates in 2022 elections. Challengers vying to oust incumbent Republican Jaime Herrera Beutler in southwest Washington’s 3rd Congressional District targeted trans activism.

Before Herrera Beutler’s election in 2010, Democrats had owned the seat for 46 of the previous 50 years. She appeared to be what the GOP needed: a woman of color with purplish politics in an increasingly suburban district. But she riled the GOP’s base by voting to impeach Donald Trump in the ex-president’s second trial.

A reporter for *The Chronicle* in Centralia summarized the stances of three local congressional challengers at a Conservative Ladies of Washington forum: Heidi St. John said transitioning and trans people were “from the pit of hell” and told the crowd she doesn’t respond to emails from publicists who list their pronouns. Joe Kent contended that the “transgender issue” is “all about control” and breaking up families. Wadi Yakhour mocked the “LGBTQ BLT sandwich community” and said they’re “building a genetically modified army, almost.”

Kent went on to best Herrera Beutler in the primary and knocked her out of the general election and office. Kent was narrowly defeated in November by newcomer Marie Gluesenkamp Perez, returning the seat to Democrats.

Performative attacks on trans people and their allies migrated across the country’s pixels, algorithms and statehouses in 2022. The Associated Press called it a classic “wedge issue” that motivates a political base—and could be used to establish conservative credentials.

In Pennsylvania’s 2022 high-stakes Republican primary for a U.S. Senate seat, candidate Dr. Mehmet Oz was attacked by a rival’s campaign ad for once hosting an episode about trans children on his TV show.

In Missouri's Senate race, an ad by GOP contender Vicky Hartzler targeted trans athletes. Twitter also suspended Hartzler's personal account for violating its rules against hateful conduct with a transphobic tweet.



In a spat with another member of Congress whose daughter is trans, Marjorie Taylor Green stuck a "Trust the Science" poster outside her office. Greene was stripped of committee duties for promoting unproven conspiracies. *Twitter*

Even the walls of Congress were weaponized. Marjorie Taylor Greene put up a sign in 2021 outside the office of Democratic Congresswoman Marie Newman, whose daughter is trans. It said: "There are TWO genders: MALE & FEMALE. Trust The Science!" Greene, a Republican from Georgia, had already been stripped of her committee assignments in the House over statements and social media posts supporting false conspiracies.

Anti-trans animus even became a rallying point around Vladimir Putin. The Kremlin had sought for a decade to win over allies on the American right, in part by denouncing gay rights, said Andrew S. Weiss, a Russia expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. On the eve of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Steve Bannon, a former adviser to Trump, commended Russia for its opposition to transgender rights. Bannon praised Putin as "anti-woke."

BOTZER'S PARENTS MET in Hawaii during World War II. William Botzer, from Mossyrock in southwest Washington, served in the Navy. Judith Clapp from Kansas City ran a camouflage factory and worked for the Red Cross. Marsha can't swear for its accuracy, but she heard that before her father sailed off to the Battle of Leyte Gulf, he arranged to have flowers sent to her mother every day for a month. After the war, the couple came to Seattle. They settled on Queen Anne Hill and William Botzer practiced law.

Marsha got the impression her parents wanted, maybe craved, peace and quiet. "It wasn't, 'I won't talk about it,'" Marsha recalls. "It was—and this is my guess—they had seen enough tension, pain and struggle that they were hoping it was over." Add the ultra-conformist 1950s and Seattle's stoicism, and Marsha remembers growing up in what felt like a small, quiet town.

Until 1962, when down the hill from the Botzer home arose The Space Needle and exotic exhibits of the World's Fair at Seattle Center. It left a mark. "I had never seen that much difference before," she says. That summer she'd offer to escort vis-



Botzer likens the Seattle of her youth to a small, quiet town—until the marvels of the 1962 World's Fair landed just down the hill from her family's home. *Washington State Archives*

itors her parents knew around the fair if they'd pay for her ticket.

Otherwise, Botzer kept pretty much to herself at Queen Anne High. She played some sports, but like her later foray into construction work she suspects she was probably trying on stereotypes “to be the male the world kept telling me I was supposed to be.” One English class tickled her curious mind. The teacher, whose name escapes her, “went all over the place.” Freud, Nietzsche, Darwin and more. The class fed Botzer's desire to understand more, discover more about one's sense of self.

Mostly, she came home and read books. She felt something she couldn't put into words. “Nothing was very clear then. Nothing at all,” she recalls. “And there were no sources of information. So not only could I put no name on the feelings, I could not find anything if I had.”

This was long before smart phones—even before “Little Big Man” depicted a Native American two-spirit person on the big screen, and Renee Richards, a trans professional tennis player, was outed in 1976 by Tucker Carlson's father. Botzer did not know that a U.S. Army veteran from the Bronx made headlines in 1955 after transitioning to “blonde beauty” Christine Jorgensen.

The most Botzer would allow in her own feelings was “seeing my mom with a number of her friends, women, getting together for maybe coffee or something, and wondering vaguely why I'm not like they are.”

That's a difficult thing for a young person to feel. “So I quickly put it away,” she says.

At the University of Washington, she was drawn to the free speech, civil rights and anti-war movements. She read *Helix*, the underground newspaper. She listened to noncommercial KRAB-FM. She knew she was expected to head for a profession through college. But with the identity struggles roiling her insides, she couldn't focus on studies and dropped out of the UW. Hired on as a helper with a Washington Natural Gas maintenance crew, she busted concrete and dug up streets to install meters and fix transmission lines. Very physical work, and almost a relief.

In Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 32 she discovered the labor movement. It provided an entry point, a vision for how you might change things. She learned about commitment when her local went on strike, about taking great risks for others, about breadwinners willing to go without a paycheck for something bigger.

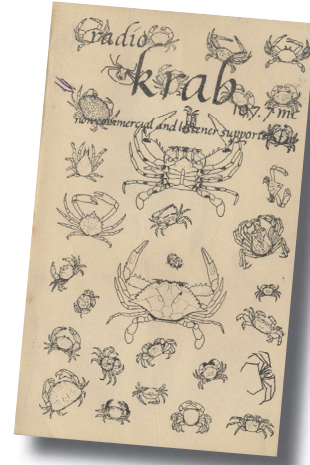
THE WORLD WAS CRACKLING with kinetic molecules of generational, cultural and political upheaval. Botzer vacationed in England to see a friend from the UW. It was the Swinging London of 1967: Chartreuse mini-skirts, paisley jackets, flouncy sleeves, flowing scarves, floppy hats. Change hung over Carnaby Street like a purple cape on a long-haired man. On to Paris, where Botzer glimpsed some of the unrest that would grip France the next year.

Back in the U.S.A., Botzer bought a VW van, painted it psychedelic colors and drove to San Francisco. But by then the acid tests and hippie vibes had been dimmed by harder drugs. “And things were getting messy.”

While rich with lessons, none of the adventures provided the hoped-for answers to her questions about gender and identity.

Botzer saved money, cleared out her bank account, quit work, and headed back to Paris in 1968. Students and workers had joined in protests that nearly toppled the French government. “Now, I can’t claim to have any part in it,” Botzer says. But she saw students and workers clapping hands. “And back home that wasn’t the case.” Hardhats were more likely to hammer hippies than hug them. Paris gave her great hope.

Like many young seekers, she hitchhiked around Europe. There was a culture on the road. Whether sleeping on trains, or in hostels, people were exchanging perspectives, possibilities, toting Vonnegut books in their backpacks, sharing newfound wisdom and dreams. Taboos were shattered. Life wasn’t a prescribed path. Botzer heard young Germans singing the civil-rights anthem “We Shall Overcome.” How odd and wonderful. Crossing Spain, she slept outside and read Ken Kesey’s *Sometimes a Great Notion*. While staying with a Spanish family, she dropped a bottle of wine while packing, smashing it on her hosts’ floor. The Span-



Seattle's KRAB hosted one of the earliest American gay and lesbian radio shows in 1971, "Make No Mistake about It, It's a Faggot and a Dyke." *Jack Straw Cultural Center*

iards laughed, told her not to worry, and sent her off with one of their bottles.

From city to city, there was a pattern. Go to a popular square. Meet other



On the road in Europe, Botzer would go to a city, find a popular square, meet other young people, laugh and learn. In the summer of 1968 she headed for Venice's vast Piazza San Marco and came away feeling, "I'm not alone."
Wikipedia Commons

young people. Talk, sing, eat, drink, learn. Late in the summer she made her way to Venice and headed for Piazza San Marco, and its vast plaza surrounded by ancient buildings such as St. Mark's Basilica. She knew nothing about the square's reputation as "the drawing room of Europe."

"I don't want to put too glowy a thing on it," she says. "But for the most part, it was possible then, maybe for just that brief moment, to travel about, and come into a city,

and know there'd be a group of hippie-type folks in a square or gathering place, who would just welcome you to sit down. And there'd be music. I never had a violent incident. Never. And then you'd get into conversations. And by that time, I was just so hooked on learning other people's stories, and just hearing what their culture was like."

In the hippies' corner of the square, Botzer heard someone say something about a cousin who made a gender change. It hit hard. She spent nights thinking, "I'm not alone. Maybe there's hope."

After a jaunt to Formentera, a Mediterranean hippie haven, and with her money dwindling, she returned to Seattle with the idea she needed to do something about her pain and frustration. She went back to the union hall, where cigarette smoke floated to the ceiling and drifted downward around her Local 32 brothers. She went back to carving through pavement with a 90-pound jackhammer.

In Seattle, freedom still floated on the "macrobiotic" kilowatts beamed by KRAB-FM. "Notes from the Underground" was a Sunday night show hosted by budding novelist Tom Robbins. "Make No Mistake About It, It's a Faggot and a Dyke," one of the earliest American gay and lesbian radio shows, aired on KRAB in 1971. It was hosted by Paul Barwick and Shan Ottey, who went on to play prominent roles in the LGBTQ community.

One night in her work truck, Botzer heard someone on KRAB mention trans-

sexuals. (The term “transsexual” was later considered outdated, in the same way “homosexual” was replaced by “gay” and “lesbian.”)

“I just about drove into a ditch,” she says.

BOTZER BEGAN CALLING doctors because it was the only path she could imagine. But doctors would say they didn’t know anything about gender issues, they couldn’t help, or just hang up. She saw 13 therapists who told her she was gay or a transvestite. She spent the early 1970s trying not to sink into hopelessness. She stayed in construction for a total of 17 years, making decent money, but “treading water.”

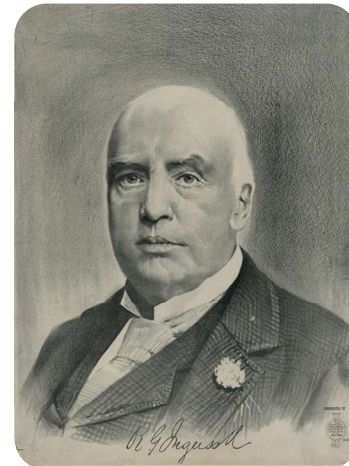
She would still have those 3 o’clock in the morning shivers when she’d tell herself: “I cannot go on like this, not having an answer to this feeling that my body doesn’t match who I am.”

One day, while in the Seattle Public Library, she saw a book with “Ingersoll” on its cover. She thought it was about the company that made compressors used in construction work. Instead, she found Robert Ingersoll’s quote about happiness. She interpreted it as a sermon about freedom. She came to think, “when we free ourselves anything can happen.” She came across the Seattle Counseling Service. Founded in 1969, SCS has touted itself as “the oldest LGBTQ-focused community mental health agency in the world.” But the service was more oriented to “LGB” than “T” back then.

That led to another of Botzer’s great life-lessons: “If it doesn’t exist, we can make it.” In 1977 she created Ingersoll Gender Center. She began building relationships with therapists and doctors. In a crude form of pre-internet outreach, Botzer would sneak business cards into Seattle Public Library books that had anything to do with sex and gender. It was her way of indicating that Ingersoll, and help, was just a call away.

The center’s main mission was to always be there for support. It started hosting regular meetings every Wednesday and incorporated as a non-profit in 1984.

Several years earlier, Botzer had heard about Dr. Stanley Biber, a Korean War U.S. Army M*A*S*H surgeon who opened a practice in Trinidad, a Col-



Botzer’s interest in philosophy led her to Robert G. Ingersoll, namesake of the Gender Center. *Library of Congress*

orado mining town about 200 miles south of Denver. In 1969, Biber started performing genital reassignment surgeries in Trinidad—and gaining attention, more than he ever had as a M*A*S*H legend who once operated on 37 consecutive soldiers before passing out from exhaustion. “Going to Trinidad” became a euphemism for transitioning. He welcomed both male and female patients.

While extremists called him “Satan’s physician” and Trinidad the “anteroom to Hell,” Biber, a former rabbinical student, did not judge his patients. “By the time they get to me, they’ve already completed their gender identity change,” he said. “I simply add the accoutrements of anatomy.”

In 1981, Botzer was feeling ready. She took her savings and went to Trinidad. Many of the townspeople were conservative. But they tended to respect Biber, an Iowa native who revered John Wayne and ranching. He had delivered their babies, sutured their appendectomies and set their broken bones. His office wasn’t secluded, but above a bank at the downtown corner of Commercial and Main. He gathered clergy and local officials and told them the visitors coming to their town needed help. And he could relieve their pain which was the right thing do. As patients streamed in, they turned out to be good for business, and acceptance grew, wrote journalist Martin J. Smith in his 2021 book, *Going to Trinidad*. Smith’s book includes Botzer, “a foundational figure in the Seattle LGBTQ community,” as well as Dr. Marci Bowers, who became Biber’s protégé. Bowers was the first trans woman to perform such surgeries. Botzer had introduced Bowers to Biber when Bowers practiced in Seattle.



Dr. Stanley Biber helped turn Trinidad, an old mining town along the Santa Fe Trail, into the country’s gender-change capital. Botzer published a study about the satisfaction of his patients. *The Legacy Project*

Botzer guided more than 100 people through Trinidad, as Biber wound up performing over 6,000 surgeries. Fortunate that she hadn’t lost her job or family, she offered herself up as a trans ambassador for a long, sympathetic 1986 story in *The Seattle Times*. “One reason I’m public about this is because there is so much pain out there,” she said. Her mother said she was proud of her only child, adding, “She brings these people over to the house and you can tell they want love. They need their families.”

And she started building alliances. Most of her co-workers in construction

were supportive. “I will forever praise those union members around me,” she says. They said she was a good worker, and they liked her. So, well, they were OK with her change.

“One way to educate is to live a good life,” she says. “Get into the world. Take your message of health and happiness to everyone you meet.”

That became her mission.

SHOULD TRANS PEOPLE have their own movement separate from the lesbian and gay communities? Some suggested that, but not Botzer. Folding her fingers tightly, she said, “I want to see us like that. In my mind we all progress together.”

She joined as many affinity groups as possible. “Sometimes it would take years to win over the understanding of an organization. So that meant I had to do the work, take a committee assignment for a couple of years and then when they saw ‘no problem here,’ I could start to say, ‘Could we involve some other folks with some other gender issues?’ It took so much energy and so much time.”

She became an early member of Hands Off Washington, a statewide coalition formed to thwart anti-gay ballot initiatives being carried over the state line by an Oregon group. With chapters across Washington, HOW and its “decline to sign” campaign played a part in keeping Initiatives 608 and 610 from gathering enough signatures to qualify for the ballot.

Emboldened, HOW pushed its own Initiative 677 to the ballot in 1997. It would protect people against discrimination because of sexual orientation in jobs, housing and public accommodations. It had high-profile support from Governor Gary Locke. But it was crushed at the polls, losing even in King County.

Undeterred, Botzer helped author a 1999 amendment that added gender identity to her hometown’s non-discrimination law.

Seattle became only the third major U.S. city to pass legislation that protected trans people from discrimination.

In 2004, she was a founding member of Equal Rights Washington, a successor to Hands Off Washington. The very name of the group suggested a shift in LGBTQ civil-rights strategy. It was no longer about warding off evangelicals trying to ford the Columbia River. It was focused in-state, on basic rights. Botzer’s new group had a hand in finally pushing an anti-discrimination law across the finish line in Olympia, after decades of frustration.

And it protected gender identity as well as sexual orientation.

By the early 21st century, Washington lawmakers like many Americans were becoming more aware of the distinctions between gender, genitals and gender



Botzer helped pressure Walmart to adopt anti-discrimination protections for gays and lesbians in the workplace. Displaying Walmart's announcement, she said, "I look forward to continuing our discussion and eagerly anticipate the day when they will also include gender identity in their non-discrimination policies." *Associated Press*

strives for diversity.

Gender identity, on the other hand, is the interplay of flesh, hormones, socialization and "something vastly more important—the brain."

To assign gender by glancing between a baby's legs, Smith writes, is a blunt instrument, like extrapolating from a single speedometer that a vehicle is a green, rusted 1952 International Harvester half-ton pickup truck. Gender identity is more than body parts, but "innumerable acts we perform." It's more like a language we use to communicate ourselves to others, and understand ourselves.

Which leads to another lesson, albeit simplistic: sexual orientation is who you go to bed with; gender identity is who you go to bed as.

BOTZER'S PROFILE GREW. After growing close to Biber, he gave her and an academic colleague access to anonymized but numerically coded records of his trans patients. While maintaining patient confidentiality, she used it to follow-up on the histories of 200 patients. Her study found 93 percent satisfaction with Biber's surgeries. She presented it at a conference of the World Professional Association of Transgender Health. She later served on the association's board of directors and helped craft its 2012 international standards of care.

She became the first trans co-chair of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in 2005. It was the most trans-inclusive of the national groups, Botzer says, and later changed its name to the National LGBTQ Task Force

One of the task force's first directors was Charlie Brydon, a Seattle business-

identity. Martin Smith, the *Going to Trinidad* author, summarizes them neatly, if generally: Genitals—long synonymous with gender—are biological, the product of genes, hormones and flesh. Even then, genitalia are not strictly binary. A small percentage of people called intersex have sexual anatomy that is not what we think of as standard-issue. (Some things are smaller in men and larger in women, for instance.) That doesn't come as a great surprise to scientists. Every human embryo starts with female substructure. Men and women both produce estrogen and testosterone. Biology, across species,

man, and the gay community's most visible early leader in the state. Brydon made inroads and allies at City Hall, particularly with Mayor Wes Uhlman, in the 1970s. Before then, no elected official had dared to meet publicly with an LGBT group.

In 2008, Botzer became one of the five co-chairs of the Obama Pride Campaign. She gave a spirited speech in front of the U.S. Capitol for the National Equality March the next year. She concluded with a signature riff: "All allies, all loving partners, all identities, safe. All. Not singular," she said, her index finger aloft. "But together," her hand closed and raised.

The rewards kept coming. In 2010, her hands helped hoist the pride flag atop the Space Needle for the first time. Then she went to China for a program sponsored by the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center. She jumped at the chance to help what she believed to be the world's largest LGBTQ population. "My job was to work with emerging trans organizations, which are now all shut down or locked up, it's really sad," she says.

At the time of her visit, a Chinese city might have a bar or a space where LGBT folks could gather, and one or two organizations. "But they couldn't advertise it, and they couldn't put a flag out, or a name on the building or anything like that."

China's government clamped down hard, though, as authoritarianism seemed to be marching around the world. In 2021, it censored an LGBTQ group's online accounts and called for broadcasters to ban "sissy men" from television. "China's LGBTQ community is fading from rainbow to gray," read a CNN headline.

Israel was another story altogether. Botzer and then Seattle Mayor Ed Murray visited Tel Aviv in 2015 for a conference organized by Israel's pioneering LGBTQ group, Aguda, and a San Francisco organization, A Wider Bridge. Murray gave the keynote speech. But before he did, activists in Seattle argued he should boycott the conference. It was an example of "pink-washing," they said, or painting over problems in Israel—specifically, the treatment of Palestinians—by representing Israel as gay-friendly.

Like Murray, Botzer trooped to Palestine. "I was there because there were human beings feeling the exact same thoughts about gender and identity in Isra-



Botzer, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force co-chair, revisited a place that expanded her horizons in 1962, to raise the Pride flag on the Space Needle in 2010. *Marsha Botzer*



Botzer was at the Capitol with Ty Stober, co-chair of Equal Rights Washington, when Gov. Gregoire signed the marriage equality bill. “Today I am even more proud to call Washington my home,” she said. *National Gay and Lesbian Task Force*

el and Palestine and everywhere else.” Identity is what they discussed, she says, and nothing that could be colored as pink-washing.

WHEN ASKED IF she would join in advocating a marriage equality law in 2012, Botzer paused for a moment. In some ways, marriage was an oppressive institution, she observed. In Washington state, a husband could legally rape his wife until 1983. And it wasn’t until 2013 that marriage was completely eliminated as a defense against sexual

assault charges.

While marriage wasn’t at the top of her wish list, team play was. The lesbian, bisexual and trans communities have been intertwined, in part, because research suggests a majority of trans people are also LGBTQ. If state leaders of the community were rallying around marriage, then she was in. She became a coordinator in Washington United for Marriage, the group fronting the 2012 campaign in the Evergreen State.

She smiled for photos at the statehouse when Governor Chris Gregoire signed a marriage equality bill in February. “Today I am even more proud to call Washington my home,” she gushed in a posting by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Botzer married her longtime lesbian partner a few years later.

AFTER THE PASSAGE of marriage equality, and a presumption the biggest battle had been won, it seemed a tipping point had been reached. Whether Barack Obama was a Jedi knight or weather vane on LGBTQ issues, he was more supportive of the community than any president in U.S. history.

While Congress and the Supreme Court did their parts—such as passing a federal hate crime law protecting LGBTQ people and ending federal and state bans on same-sex marriage—Obama filled in gaps. He signed executive orders prohibiting federal contractors from discriminating against LGBTQ people. He lifted the military’s rules prohibiting trans people from openly serving. He was the first president to mention trans people in a State of the Union speech.

“That was quite a big deal,” Botzer says. “So, yeah, we didn’t get everything we wanted, for sure. But it was still worth all the fight.”

Trans men and women became more visible. And in what some see as a cultural breakthrough akin to Ellen DeGeneres coming out on TV, Amy Schneider streamed and beamed into millions of middle-American homes as a mega champ on *Jeopardy!* with a winning streak spanning from November 2021 into the new year. The Ohio native in pearls was “just an appealingly wonky, nerdy know-it-all kicking butt on a game show, who seemed like a really nice person,” said Susan Stryker, author of *Transgender History*.

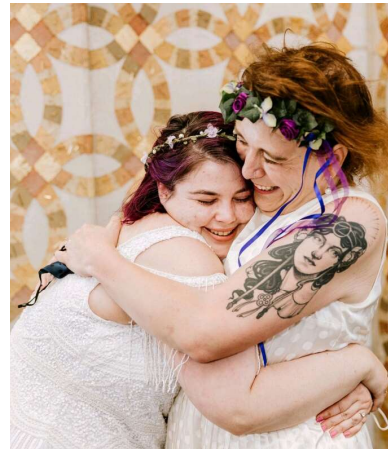
But more visibility incited hostility. Of course, it wasn’t all won, particularly for trans people. Conservatives targeted them as a small and vulnerable population they could score points off.

The opposition has grown more sophisticated, Botzer says. Instead of vile epithets and spittle, trans people now face book-length arguments supported by right-wing think tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation, a Washington, D.C., mainstay.

Schneider’s success unfolded against the worst year on record in terms of anti-LGBTQ legislation in many parts of the country. By early 2022, a flood of nearly 200 state bills sought to restrict or erode LGBTQ rights, mainly for trans youth. They fell into three chief categories: banning gender-affirming medical care for teens; blocking classroom discussions, curriculum and library books about LGBTQ issues, and barring trans youth from competing in sports.

Critics said the crusade was political opportunism and transphobia in the guise of “protecting children”—a catchphrase and strategy used decades earlier to motivate homophobic voters.

Utah Governor Spencer Cox stood up against a bill that would ban all trans girls from competing in school sports. Cox, a Republican in a deeply conservative state, vetoed the bill. He cited five statistics: 75,000 Utah kids participated in high school sports; 4 of them were trans; only 1 was playing girls’ sports; 86 percent of trans youth nationally reported suicidality; 56 percent have attempted suicide.



After her run as *Jeopardy!* champ, Amy Schneider (right) was grand marshal at San Francisco’s Pride parade, threw out the first pitch at a Giants game, and married her girlfriend, Genevieve Davis (left). *Amy Schneider*



Decades ago, Botzer put Ingersoll Center business cards inside Seattle library books that had to do with sex and gender as a form of outreach. She became co-chair of the Washington LGBTQ Commission after it was created in 2019. *Washington State LGBTQ Commission*

Utah lawmakers overrode his veto and their bill became law.

While Botzer feels positive about her home state of Washington’s protections and advances, she knows there’s always a need for vigilance. And she is not the retiring type. She was part of newly elected Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell’s transition team. She is co-leader of the state 15-member LGBTQ Commission. Because the pandemic led commissioners to meet remotely, she said the group still felt new, two years after its creation.

“All these advances, the positive laws and policies, the healthcare access wins, the support for individuals and families, all these were hard won and required years of work. This process is the real and often unseen heart of all the change we have made. This work is what I cherish the most. It is done by many, together, and it is what brings a better life for everyone.”

For most of its existence, Ingersoll solely relied on volunteers. It now has paid staff members, and a support-group meeting streak that survived the pandemic and is approaching 2,600 consecutive weeks.

After thousands of hours in meetings, decades in founding and supporting organizations, untold conflicts and joys, Botzer still says there is no better way to spend your heartbeats than by helping others.

“I love good people. I want to meet more of them and work with them. Together. Not singly. Together. That gives me such joy when we create something together. Whatever it is. Those moments are everything.”

Bob Young