

# LOU SULLIVAN

b. June 16, 1951, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

d. March 2, 1991, San Francisco, California

## TRANSGENDER AUTHOR AND ACTIVIST

*“My problem is that I can’t accept life for what it is. I feel that there is something deep and wonderful underneath it.”*

**Sullivan successfully advocated for homosexuality to be removed from the list of contraindications for transition surgery.**

Born Sheila in a Midwestern Catholic household, Sullivan recorded in a childhood diary the joy of “playing boys.” As a teenager, Sullivan was fascinated by male homosexuality. “I want to look like what I am, but I don’t know what someone like me looks like,” she recalled. When Sullivan began to identify as a transgender gay man, the prospects were daunting: “What can become of a girl whose real desire and passion is with male homosexuals?”

Standing at the threshold of an uncertain new world, Sullivan took the first step by adopting the identity of a female transvestite. After moving to San Francisco, Sullivan took the first name Lou, lived as a gay man, identified as a female-to-male

(FTM) transsexual and medically transitioned to a gender-confirming male body.

When Sullivan was initially denied transition surgery due to his homosexual orientation, he publicly advocated for homosexuality to be removed from the list of contraindications. The successful campaign provided a breakthrough in widespread acknowledgment of the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity.

Sullivan became a peer counselor for gender-questioning women and corresponded with FTMs nationwide. He helped create the GLBT Historical Society of San Francisco and FTM, the first exclusively female-to-male organization.

Sullivan remained an outspoken transgender activist until his death from AIDS at age 39.

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