

MISS MAJOR GRIFFIN-GRACY

EARLY TRANSGENDER ACTIVIST

b. October 25, 1940

She is a lifelong LGBTQ activist who participated in the seminal Stonewall Uprising.

“I’d like for young transgender people to go to school, learn like everyone else does, and then get out there and live their lives.”

Miss Major Griffin-Gracy is a lifelong LGBTQ activist. She participated in the seminal Stonewall Uprising in 1969. She assisted infected people during the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, and she has been advocating for trans women of color, particularly those who have survived incarceration in men’s prisons, for more than four decades.

Assigned male at birth, Griffin-Gracy was raised in the South Side of Chicago. As a teen, she met an older drag queen who taught her how to dress and apply cosmetics.

Griffin-Gracy attended drag balls and immersed herself in drag culture. She gradually came out to her family but continued to present herself publicly as a male.

At age 16, Griffin-Gracy enrolled in college and lived in the men’s dorm. She was outed by her roommate, after he discovered her women’s clothing, and expelled. Her attempt at college elsewhere ended similarly. She moved to New York at age 22, where she earned money as a drag performer and sex worker.

In the 1960s, police raids of drag shows and other gay hangouts were commonplace.

A regular at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, Griffin-Gracy was arrested on June 28, 1969—the first night of the historic Stonewall Riots—when she joined other patrons fighting police who stormed the bar. A year later, while working as a prostitute, she was arrested and incarcerated for robbing a customer. She spent five years in and out of prisons, where she was humiliated and abused. The experience motivated her to help other trans women in trouble.

After her release, Griffin-Gracy entered a relationship with a cisgender woman. They had a son together and moved to San Diego in 1978. After they broke up, Griffin-Gracy continued to co-parent their child.

In California, Griffin-Gracy worked with a food bank, helping trans women who were incarcerated, homeless, or suffering from addiction. At the height of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and ’90s, she assisted community members at the Tenderloin AIDS Resource Center.

Around 2004 Griffin-Gracy joined the Transgender Gender-Variant & Intersex Justice Project (TGIJP) to assist incarcerated trans women. She later became its executive director. In 2019 she founded House of GG, a sanctuary offering a range of services for trans and gender-nonconforming people.

Griffin-Gracy has received numerous honors and is the subject of the award-winning documentary “Major!” (2015). She co-authored “Miss Major Speaks: Conversations with a Black Trans Revolutionary,” published in 2023. She and her partner, Beck Witt, a trans man and fellow activist, have a 2-year-old biological son. They live in Arkansas.



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