

About Ginny Knuth

Or what little I know.....

I was terrified. I was so scared of what I was about to do that I kept track of every passing five minutes on the large clock that graced the top of one of the downtown San Francisco skyscrapers. It was clearly visible from the lobby on the 7th floor of the Pac Bell switching center at 2nd. and Folsom. Clearly, visible also, was the fact that I was not getting any work done at all. At this point, I really didn't care. It is the sort of feeling when you are standing on the brink of suicide. Nothing else seems to matter.

I had contacted Gloria by mail through an advertisement place discretely in the back of this little dirty book "The Transvestian" that I had purchased at a 7th Street adult bookstore less than a block from where I was staying at the Americana Hotel in San Francisco. This was to be the first night I actually dressed up and went somewhere and met people. What kind of people? GAWD who knows. Maybe they were carnivorous or something.

Gloria had advised me in a phone call to her, that I could always go male, but I knew that if I were so far gone in this search for self-evolution, I should commit to the process and wear the uniform of what I was about to become.....whatever that was.

The trip out of the door of my hotel room and past my supervisor's open window is a story unto itself, and the trip to the elevator uneventful as the atriums and halls were devoid of guests. Maybe the 4th floor wasn't all that busy, I thought. I arrived at the elevator which was thankfully, equally empty of habitation. Not so for the opening into the underground parking where I was greeted by a sea of "straights". I wanted to scream and run, but it was simply not possible. My sincere thanks to all those nights in a bar full of drunks where we, the band, were crashing and burning. I had learned how to keep on going in spite of what was going on. I did the same this night as well. Like, what ELSE was I going to do?

I arrived at the Chez Mollet on 4th and Bryant on an evening in March 1987 and made my way inside. No carnivores, yet, I thought. Good. I tried to avoid the gazes of diners in the small passage way to the meeting room in the back, where ETVC (Educational TV Channel) was holding their monthly get-together. The first person to greet me at the entrance was Ginny Knuth.

I was quite puzzled why this smiling lady (and a REAL one, too) was taking money at the door for the organization. She greeted me like an old friend, even though it was painfully obvious that I was a "newbie". She spoke softly and this made it difficult to hear over the noise of the diners I had just passed and the group of people in the meeting room. I nervously paid her the money and went inside. Almost afraid to betray myself to anyone.

Several meetings with ETVC went by and each time I noted with optimism that Ginny was always there at the door taking the money. On many occasions I would talk with her and assist in taking tickets or money for larger events. It should be said here that her husband (A TV I only knew as Nancy Ann) was the treasurer of the group. Nancy Ann was Ginny's husband. ETVC was not formally organized in any way, but for several years, Nancy Ann was in charge of the finances and was also a fixture at the bar in the Chez. I always noticed that she had the most overdone eyeliner and lashes that I had ever seen. It was almost intimidating not to mention that basso-profundo voice. I actually feared her. Good qualities for the treasurer.

Ginny actually functioned not only as the door ticket-meister (or meistress?) but in so many ways was the one connecting point for so many people such as I who were new to this whole genre. And

she appeared to treat everyone as though she had been their life-long friend. It was remarkable that a close-knit relationship existed with this group. We were almost like girl-scouts and she was the den-mother of us all. And I was proud of that. She was a "straight" who never condescended nor seemed disapproving. She never criticized or confronted. This is singular in light of all of the petty politics that often went on in the rest of the meeting room at an ETVC gathering.

Nevertheless, we were in a space and time when our flocking together was a necessity. It was a concentration point for information exchange and commraderie with socially displaced outcasts like ourselves. That Ginny Knuth was there to approve of each of us in some way seemed to signal that it was O.K. and that we were somehow legitimized.

And she was ALWAYS there. Even on those nights when Nancy Ann's eyelashes at the bar were missing, she was the one anchor point that could be counted on.

As years wore on, I drifted away from ETVC (which Nancy Ann later incorporated as TGSF) I became very active in a therapy group with Mildred Brown in the summer of 1988. Ginny continued with TGSF for several years. I believe that Nancy Ann died first and within a couple of years, Ginny developed complications from Diabetes and lost a leg. As I have heard, she continued to be active with TGSF until her own death a couple of years later.

TGSF continues to grant an award named after Ginny Knuth to an outstanding member and I held that award for two years in succession, an achievement never done before.

But, I don't believe that I go through an entire day without thinking of her. She was a significant icon of the singularly most important night of my transition.

Susan Laird
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Ginny Knuth 1934-1997

The gender community mourns the passing of Ginny Knuth, a dedicated volunteer active in ETVC, IFGE, and the Significant-Other Support groups. Ginny died of natural causes on November 23, at home in San Francisco, after a lengthy illness. Ginny gave so much of herself to us that we named ETVC's highest service award after her. She earned international recognition as well; in 1994 IFGE honored her with a Trinity Award.

Ginny was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1934. Her first 40 years included a marriage and a business career in the Midwest. After a divorce she spent time in Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco, where a succession of friends introduced her to the gay community. Always heavy, Ginny had a poor self-image that these gentlemen encouraged her to improve. Like many women with close gay friends, she despaired of finding a straight lover with the same endearing qualities.

Ginny then met Don, a straight man who seemed special. After a year of dating, with dread and trepidation, Don disclosed his transvestism and introduced Ginny to his alter-ego, Nancy Ann Martine. To Nancy Ann's relief, Ginny gave her a scarf to help cover her beard when she goes out. Nancy Ann then went to the Dream convention in 1983 and discovered ETVC. Next month, Nancy Ann and Ginny visited the 1983 ETVC Halloween Social. Drawn into the group, Nancy Ann and Ginny were elected to the Social Committee, and then later Nancy Ann was elected Treasurer. Ginny served for many years as our office administrator.

Ginny's struggles to understand and accept Nancy Ann lead her to involvement with the Significant-Others Support Group and a long-running column in the ETVC Newsletter: *Ginny's Tales from the Other Side*. Over the years, Ginny helped organize the ETVC Library and archives, the production and publication of the newsletter, the monthly Poker Social, and numerous social events and meetings. After winning the Member of the Year Award several times in a row, it was decided to name it in her honor (partly to give others a chance to win it too!).

Ginny served for countless hours on the ETVC hot line and was the first friendly soul that thousands of us encountered in our journeys out of the closet. She was always available for wives and girlfriends who were puzzled, upset, or curious about their gender-variant husbands and answered calls and correspondence from around the world.





Ginny's ties with the gay community in San Francisco has lead to years of cooperation with the Imperial Court system, involvement in GLBT events, and the remarkably harmonious relationship that the San Francisco gender community enjoys with the local gay and lesbian groups. Sadly, many of Ginny's gay friends were lost to AIDS, and she gave much of herself in the battle against HIV.

A diabetic, Ginny's health began to fail in 1992. Despite this, she maintained a busy schedule with ETVC until the summer of 1997. While foreseen, her passing has brought much sadness to the Bay Area and to the larger transgender community. Ginny's life shows us how someone with a kind heart and a willingness to get involved can do so much to make the world better.

Ginny's contributions are summarized well in the 1994 Trinity Awards Ceremony program: *"Ginny Knuth; A long-standing advisor to and advocate of the transgender community, Ginny has contributed notably in her association with the Educational TV Channel of San Francisco. Through the years she has contributed a huge amount to that organization's growth. She initiated and strengthened the bonds between the transgendered community and the gay/lesbian community in San Francisco. In all her efforts and involvements through the years, we appreciate that her prime motive has been her great love for us all."*



We particularly wish to extend our sympathy and condolences to Nancy Ann Martine, who was faithfully devoted to Ginny until the end.

-- Jamie Faye Fenton