

As a seven-year-old living in Florence AL, I was certainly not socially, culturally, or politically aware. What I was aware of was fun, and that's why I was eager to march in the annual gay pride parade. I did not know what "gay" meant, nor did I really know what "pride" meant. What I did know was that my mom and her very close "friend" were going to let me carry the rainbow flag and march near the head of the parade. We had hardly reached the first corner on the parade route on that beautiful June day when a reality I did not understand, but absolutely did not like, confronted me for the first time. I wonder what corner it was that Pauli Murray came to in her life that pushed her to become one of the most indispensable influencers in the LGBTQ rights, women's rights, and African-American rights arenas of the American Civil Rights movements. That we both turned our corners is a similarity I truly treasure.

At that important moment in my life I was so happy to be one of the two hundred or so marchers, but even happier just to be a partner to my mom and her friend. But the beauty of that morning turned ugly as we turned the corner and were verbally assaulted by a group of twenty people-men, women, and children who were holding signs that I could not read, but yelling something I definitely understood; "You are all going to hell!" I have a vivid memory of a man in a Ku Klux Klan robe holding a child-the next generation-and spewing that venom in our direction. It only took moments for my mother and her friend to decide they wanted no part of that scene, so they grabbed me and my flag and took me away. Looking back on that moment today, I see it as a type of anchor to the person I am and to the person I am becoming- namely a

queer woman who wants to make the world a better place by providing representation to those who are discriminated against.

Pauli Murray remains an inspiration for people in the LGBTQ community. Her personal struggles are something I can relate to. She was born with the name "Anne Pauline" but chose to shorten it to Pauli as she felt it better represented her masculine presentation (Pauli). She was also hospitalized and begged the doctors for gender affirmation care leading many historians to believe she was actually a transgender man (LGBTQ+). As well as questioning her gender identity she was unsure about her sexuality. Despite her marriage to a man, Pauli wrote that being with a man felt wrong and would go on to have at least two long-term relationships with women (Schulz). She faced the internal struggle of coming to terms with one's identity as well as the external discrimination as a queer black woman.

Pauli had a deep passion for law and a driving desire to help others. She was denied by Harvard due to the fact that she was a woman. Later, however, she would become the first African-American to graduate from Yale Law School (Pauli). According to the National Women's History Museum, "In 1966, Murray was one of the twelve founders of the National Organization for Women (NOW)" (Pauli). Today, Pauli Murray is best known for coining the term "Jane Crow." (Jane). This term was based on the already existing term Jim Crow and described the treatment of women. By creating this allegory she united the struggles of the African-American community with those women were facing.

Pauli Murray was one of several influential leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Her writing was highly influential and was featured in several newspapers including *Common Sense* and NAAPC's publication *The Crisis* (Who). While attending Howard Pauli wrote a paper claiming "separate" part of Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) violated the 13th and 14th amendments. (Pauli). This argument would later go on to form the basis of the Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) case as Spottswood Robinson, her professor, used the essay as inspiration (Schulz). In an effort to challenge segregation, Pauli became the first African-American to be ordained as an Episcopal priest (Jane).

Despite her constant battle with discriminatory policies and mentalities, Pauli Murray truly demonstrated the values of civics, civility, and collaboration. She bridged the gaps between three of the most monumental movements in American history and devoted her life to working behind the scenes for a better future. I grew up wondering what would have happened had I never approached that corner. I wonder what has become of that little boy and if he will ever grow to realize the hate in his father's ways. As I grow up in a world where so many are still seen as less than, I hope to be like Pauli Murray and use my powers and abilities to push the country forward.

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