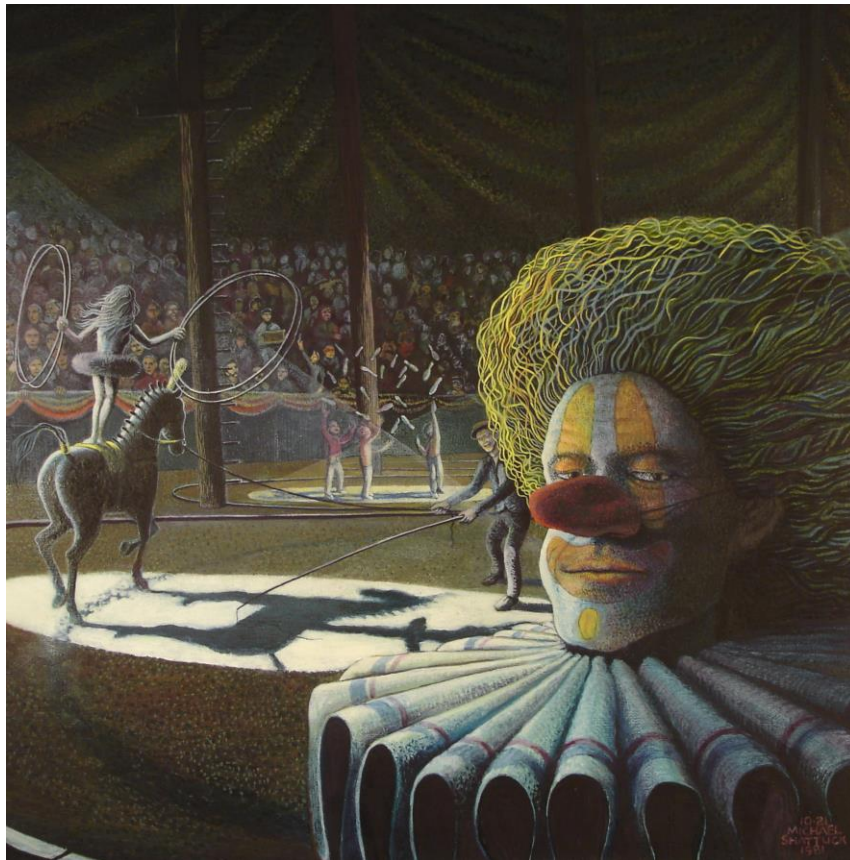


# FROM THIS DAY FORWARD

(temporary working title)

DIRECTED BY SHARON SHATTUCK

PRODUCED BY MARTHA SHANE & SHARON SHATTUCK



Trisha Shattuck. Calliope (Self Portrait), 1981.

**SUNDANCE DOCUMENTARY FUND PROPOSAL**

**PROJECT TOPIC**

Over the past few years, significant gains have been made in lesbian and gay rights, including the nation's growing support for marriage equality. This has been incredibly exciting for organizations and activists in the LGBT community, yet the work is by no means complete. Transgender individuals continue to face enormous obstacles, including discrimination in the work place, lack of acceptance by their families, refusal of care by medical professionals, and higher than average rates of homelessness and poverty. According to the most recent National Transgender Discrimination Survey, published in 2011, sixty-three percent of the 6,450 respondents had experienced "a serious act of discrimination--events that would have a major impact on a person's quality of life and ability to sustain themselves financially or emotionally."

Considering the scope of this problem in the US, we see *From This Day Forward* as a film that can ease people into the issue of transgender rights through an intimate story that will break down people's stereotypes about transgender individuals. Subverting the narrative most common in mainstream media, which tends to portray transgender individuals as "homewreckers," Trisha is an artist living in rural northern Michigan, who stayed with her wife Marcia after transitioning. Told through the eyes of her daughter, director Sharon Shattuck, *From This Day Forward* never shies away from how difficult it was for the family to embrace Trisha as a woman. Yet the love that they have for her is palpable, and the family's journey from rejection to acceptance of Trisha unfolds with stunning grace and compassion.

Trisha's honesty in narrating her personal journey of transition will draw audiences into her world. Most people can understand the suffering that can accompany holding close a secret, or living a life that feels like a lie; in Trisha's telling, the story of feeling that she was born into the wrong gender is eminently relatable. As she talks about feeling trapped between two worlds, it emerges that despite the support of her family, Trisha must still negotiate her gender on a daily basis, particularly because of attitudes and the potential for discrimination in her tiny Michigan town.

Similarly, the father-daughter relationship between Trisha and Sharon gives this story universal appeal, raising questions about the effect that Trisha's coming out had on Sharon's experience growing up. Discrimination against the children of LGBT parents continues to be a major issue in the US, and Sharon and her sister had long felt that their father could have chosen to wait until they were older, rather than coming out while they were in their already tumultuous pre-teen years. Yet many parent-child relationships hinge on these questions: To what extent should parents make independent decisions that enable them to live the life they envision for themselves, and to what extent are self-sacrifices required? Seeing Sharon and Trisha come to terms with their shared history will deeply move anyone who's ever struggled with their upbringing.

Ultimately, Sharon's family—her mother Marcia, her father Trisha (formerly Michael), herself, and her younger sister Laura—is the traditional all-American family. With two parents and two children, a home in a small Midwestern town, and summers spent in a cabin on a nearby lake, their relatability make the story well designed not just to preach to the choir, but to speak to a broader audience of Americans, who may know very little about what it means to be transgender. In this way, we believe *From This Day Forward* can have a major impact on the levels of discrimination and prejudice faced by transgender individuals and their families nationwide.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

Having grown up in a transgender family, I've paid particular attention to media about trans-people over the years. Many of the transgender films I've seen (*Southern Comfort*, *Boys Don't Cry*) don't focus on familial relationships, and instead feature the plight of a central transgender character--but there is always more to the story. For awhile I thought that to tell that larger story, I would make an essay-style documentary, and I interviewed many transgender families across the country to shed light on what makes us tick. But the story I was crafting wasn't as compelling as my own family's story--it was too large, and felt impersonal. So I turned the focus inward. I believe that by telling the story of one transgender family, of MY family, I can reveal elements that are both personal and universal, and that will ring true for viewers no matter what kind of family they come from.

As you come to know my dad on film, it's hard to not be wrapped up in her story. You wish Trish didn't live in a small, conservative town. You come to question the marriage that prevents her from fully transitioning. You feel that these things are holding her back, preventing her from being the woman she so deeply wants to be. But then you meet Trisha's wife Marcia, who has been incredibly brave, understanding and selfless—she supported her spouse transitioning from male to female, and despite identifying as solidly “straight,” chose to stay with Trisha. You come to know my sister Laura, and you understand her conflicting feelings about watching her father morph into a woman—“It is different when it's your immediate family member— referring to my dad as ‘my mom’ or ‘she’ just doesn't feel natural in my heart. To refer to my dad as “my mom” or ‘she’...it's very challenging.”

And in this vein, *From This Day Forward* asks the audience, as it has me, to observe, to love and to accept. To see our parents and ourselves as complicated individuals, struggling with identity in a society that increasingly begs us to ‘be exactly who we're meant to be.’ To try to understand the complex dynamic of a love and a family that has all sorts of conflicting needs.

My relationship with my dad, Trisha, has grown into one of friendship and acceptance, but it wasn't always easy. Now that I'm an adult, about to marry my own husband, I have a genuine desire to understand my mom and dad's story in a way that I couldn't when I was younger. Now that the pain and awkwardness have mostly subsided, what's left is a need for conversation, for humor, for love and understanding--and what better showcase for these universal family traits than a wedding?

## **STORY SUMMARY**

When filmmaker Sharon Shattuck's artist dad, Michael, came out as transgender and decided to adopt a female persona, Sharon was in the awkward throes of middle school. Trisha, as she asked to be called, wore control-top pantyhose, skirts, and makeup to pick up the Shattuck sisters from school, much to their chagrin.

The changes to Trisha's appearance were difficult for her straight-identified, type-A physician wife, Marcia, to accept. Having married, and fallen in love with a man, Marcia found herself doubting whether she could love Trisha as a woman. And, as a heterosexual woman, she felt that

the idea of walking down the street, holding hands with a woman, would bring into question her own identity.

Meanwhile, having decided that life with divorced parents would be preferable to explaining to everyone that their dad had become a woman, the filmmaker and her younger sister, along with other family members, pressured the couple to divorce. After agreeing and announcing that they would be separated, Marcia and Trisha found themselves heartbroken and decided that they loved each other too much to separate. At that point, the Shattuck family began to negotiate a delicate compromise. Trisha would tone down her feminine presentation most of the time, but would still be free to express her femininity under certain circumstances. Committed to staying together as a family, Marcia and Trisha began a careful balancing act that would test their love for one another, and ultimately prove even more complicated than expected.

Within their small town in rural northern Michigan, Trisha stood out. Shopping with their father, Sharon and her sister would feel guilty if they accidentally called her ‘Dad’ in public, drawing attention to Trisha’s transition, and potentially embarrassing her. And yet Trisha was more committed than ever to being a good father, through a turbulent time. Traveling four hours every weekend to Ann Arbor for family therapy with a psychologist trained in gender issues, the family found themselves teaching the therapist about their situation, rather than the other way around. Because the Shattuck family was subverting the traditional narrative—in which gender transition inevitably means betrayal, divorce, and shattered relationships—outsiders rarely knew how to respond to their situation.

After college, Sharon moved to New York City, while her parents remained in rural Michigan. But as the family comes together to plan Sharon’s wedding, she begins asking questions—about her parent’s ongoing commitment to one another, about her sister’s coping strategies, about Trisha’s newly “butch” appearance. She reminds Trisha of something that she said years before, “I hope you’ll let me wear a dress when I walk you down the aisle,” and waits to see how her father will appear on the big day.

*From This Day Forward* will combine beautiful tableaux showing Trisha living her life in small-town Michigan—practicing karate, planting trees, painting—with deeply emotional interviews and verité scenes with family members. Employing the filmmaker’s skills as an animator, Trisha’s paintings, in which she expresses herself freely, and which act as a diary documenting the major events of her life, will come alive, revealing both the deep joy and the inner turmoil that she experiences as a result of her compromise.

Ultimately, the film will ask questions relevant to all of us: What are the sacrifices that we are willing to make for love? And when do those sacrifices go too far? Where do sexuality and gender intersect? And how does one’s gender identity evolve over the course of a lifetime? As the Shattucks approach Sharon’s wedding day, they address the truce at the heart of their family, and understand what it really means to stay together.

## **ABOUT THE SAMPLE WORK**

- **Prior work**

*After Tiller* is a documentary co-directed and co-produced by *From This Day Forward* producer Martha Shane. In telling the story of the last four late abortion doctors in America, in the wake of the murder of their close friend and colleague Dr. George Tiller, we intended to shed more light, rather than more heat, on one of the most divisive issues in America today. Similar to *From This Day Forward*, one of our major goals with *After Tiller* was to humanize individuals who are incredibly stigmatized and often forced to live in the shadows. By focusing on intimate stories, rather than broader political arguments, and by embracing rather than avoiding the complexity of the situation it portrays, *From This Day Forward*, like *After Tiller*, will have the potential to affect people from a broad range of political persuasions, and to illuminate the personal side of a highly politicized issue.

*The Animated Life of A.R. Wallace* and *Whale Fall: After Life of a Whale* are two short videos, co-directed and co-produced by *From This Day Forward* director Sharon Shattuck. Each video tackles a dense science topic in a creative, entertaining and accurate way, using paper puppetry and humor. Both videos focus on a main character to bring the story to life: *Whale Fall* tells a story of deep sea ecological succession through the experience of one whale, and *Wallace* tells the true story of the Victorian naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace, who co-created the theory of natural selection (along with Charles Darwin).

Animation selects from the Emmy-nominated documentary film *The City Dark* show another aesthetic from Sharon's diverse animation arsenal—the graphics are hand-drawn and built to mimic director (and *From This Day Forward* co-producer) Ian Cheney's old stargazing notebooks.

Together, these three videos showcase Sharon's expertise using creative storytelling, illustrations and animation to bring to life what could otherwise be dry, historical topics. This same expertise will be brought to bear in the direction of *From This Day Forward*: we will use creative, intricate animations when we visit the Shattuck family's past, or Trisha's inner psyche, and we will incorporate humor into the film, where appropriate.

- **Current sample or rough cut**

We are including the most recent film trailer, and two separate edited sequences, all part of the first half of the film.

In the trailer, viewers are introduced to a major plot point, Sharon's engagement and the subsequent planning of her wedding, that will bring the family together and bring the question of Trisha's gender expression to the forefront: what will Trisha wear on her daughter's big day? The larger identity story is also hinted at in the trailer, as Sharon asks off-camera, "Do you want me to call you Trish, and she, and *not* Dad?"

In the first sequence, we meet the Shattuck family: Trisha, Marcia, Laura, and Sharon, and we get to know Trisha, and her quirky personality, especially well. We see that Sharon has given Trisha an HD camera, to record her thoughts when Sharon isn't around.

Trisha and Marcia tell their love story, and we see them together as a loving couple, and begin to imagine how complicated their lives have been. We get a feel for the quirky, small town the Shattucks reside in—in all its nosy, gossipy glory. We also begin to see the ongoing tension within the family that centers on Trisha’s gender presentation.

What’s absent: the entire second half of the film, with the buildup to the wedding. The timing is truncated in this sample—everything moves quite fast, and we plan to give viewers more time to get to know Trisha and the Shattucks in the full film. Some of the b-roll of the family will be replaced with higher-quality footage in Spring 2014, when we do our final two-week pickup shoot in Michigan. The music is temporary and will be replaced by a score with a similar rustic feel, and the graphics are also temporary—they are in the spirit of what we’d like to do with the film, but we will use more of Trisha’s paintings to tell her story.

The sequences reflect our intent to make the story an engaging character study through a mix of humor, candid interviews, cinematic b-roll, and verité. We’ve included some sample graphics in the title sequence that showcase Trisha’s paintings—because her paintings are a visual diary, we will revisit her work in animated form throughout the film, to move the story forward, and to go back in time.

## **PROJECT STAGE**

*From This Day Forward* is currently in post-production, and we intend to premiere the film at a major festival in early 2015. When we applied to the Sundance Documentary Fund for a development grant in 2012, our vision for the film was extremely different. At that time, we saw *From This Day Forward* as a survey film, which would follow several different LGBT families, and draw attention to the challenges that these families shared. As we pursued this approach, however, it began to emerge that the more personal story—of Sharon and her family—was the most potent. After making this discovery, we were able to begin shaping a powerful and deeply intimate narrative that explores not only what it means to be a transgender person in this country, but also parent-child relationships, the sacrifices made for love, the potency of secrets, and so much more. We then decided to re-purpose the interviews that we had filmed with LGBT families nationwide for an interactive website. Following the new focus on Sharon and Trisha’s personal story, filmmaker Martha Shane, co-producer and co-director of *After Tiller*, was brought on as a producer on the project. In January, we started editing the film with Frederick Shanahan, who most recently edited the Emmy-nominated documentary *The City Dark*. For the next six to nine months, we will be editing full-time with Frederick. Sharon, who previously did animations for *The City Dark* and *The Search For General Tso* (premiering April 2014), will be simultaneously working on animating Trisha’s paintings, which will beautifully and intimately illustrate the story of her transition. We will also be returning to northern Michigan for two weeks of final shooting and pick-up shots with Sharon’s family in late spring. Starting in early or mid-summer, we will work with a professional composer to score the film, and we will begin fine cutting with the goal of finishing the film in the fall, and submitting to major film festivals including Sundance, SXSW, and Hot Docs.

## **DISTRIBUTION & MARKETING STRATEGY**

Our distribution strategy begins with premiering the film at a major film festival, such as Sundance, SXSW, or Hot Docs, in early 2015, and then touring the film to both LGBT and non-LGBT festivals around the world. Working with a sales agent, we will seek limited theatrical distribution, as well as a major television broadcast, both in the US and internationally, and we anticipate that the majority of our audience will see the film during its broadcast. We see our primary domestic broadcast options as the PBS shows *POV* or *Independent Lens*, both of which would be ideal because of the incredible outreach efforts that they make on behalf of their films; HBO, which often broadcasts very personal films on difficult subject matters; or the more recently launched Al Jazeera America. Following the film's limited theatrical release, we anticipate a major non-theatrical screenings tour, focused on starting a dialogue around the film at conferences, colleges, and universities, in partnership with major LGBT organizations. Finally, we intend to release the film on DVD, VOD, and online forums, with a particular focus on bringing the film to rural areas.

## **AUDIENCE & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Our goals for the outreach and audience engagement phase of *From This Day Forward* are three-fold. First, we want to fight discrimination against transgender individuals, by introducing audiences to the filmmaker's father Trisha, an amazing woman who is defined not only by her gender expression, but by her painting, her martial arts skills, her humor, her love of nature, and above all her dedication to her family. Secondly, we intend to use the film to foster and grow a supportive community of LGBT individuals and their families, particularly focused on the children of LGBT parents, and create a forum in which they can openly and honestly communicate about their challenges. Finally, we intend for the film to be used as a tool for educating people in the helping professions—particularly social workers, psychologists, therapists, doctors, and teachers—about transgender identity issues, and how they can be supportive and sensitive to the needs of transgender individuals and their families.

In order to make these goals a reality, we will be planning several different grassroots tours of the film, including a tour in partnership with major LGBT organizations and a tour of colleges and universities. At present, our closest working partners are the Family Equality Council and COLAGE, a group for children of LGBT families, and both have provided letters of support for the film. These organizations have large mailing lists, networks, and resources, so it is thrilling to already have their support at this early stage of the project. In addition, we are planning a tour of professional conferences, where members of the helping professions—teachers, doctors, therapists, and others—gather to discuss challenges and find new solutions. Particularly because so many transgender individuals experience refusal of care, or are forced to teach their providers how to care for them because of lack of information, we believe that it's crucial to start a dialogue within these groups about how to best support transgender individuals and their families. In addition, we will work with leaders in these various fields to create specific educational guides for individuals in each profession, which will use the film as a starting point for a discussion about the best practices for working with transgender individuals.

## **INTERACTIVE ELEMENTS**

We see *From This Day Forward* as a starting point for an important national dialogue about LGBT families and transgender rights, particularly in rural areas of the country. Thus, we will be creating an interactive website that builds on the story and message introduced by the film, then broadens to include the full range of diverse and unique LGBT families.

In researching this project, we recorded numerous on-camera interviews with LGBT individuals, which display a wide variety of experiences and profound insights into what it means to be a family. These interviews include Joani McBride, a transgender woman living in Florida, and her adult son Sean; Michael Kanteras, a transgender man who fought for custody of his children in a case that ultimately reached the Florida Supreme Court and was taken up by the ACLU; Elise, an active military member who is veiled so as to remain anonymous (because the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell doesn't cover transgender service members), and who discusses her four children and the experience of being transgender in the military; Catherine and Lucy, a lesbian couple with two kids living in Seattle; David Garcia, who heads the LGBT center in Ferndale, Michigan, and talks about the experience of LGBT families across his state; and many more.

By building out from the film to share more stories of LGBT families, the audience's understanding of this issue will deepen, and we will be able to create a community around the film. Through the use of social media, including twitter hashtags and memes, we will engage LGBT families, who will then be able to share their own stories on the website. We are dedicated to the creation of this website in part because it will allow us to engage rural LGBT families, like Sharon's, who might not otherwise encounter the film at film festivals or in theaters.

## **KEY CREATIVE PERSONNEL**



**Sharon Shattuck** (Director/Producer) is a filmmaker and freelance animator based in New York City. Her animations are featured in several award-winning documentary films and shorts, including the Emmy-nominated feature, *The City Dark*, which aired on PBS's POV series in 2012, and *The Search For General Tso*, premiering April 2014. Her short video and animation work has appeared in the New York Times, PBS, Slate, ProPublica, and Radiolab, and she is a contributing blogger for the Huffington Post and the Advocate. She has degrees in environmental science and journalism.

**Martha Shane** (Producer) is a Brooklyn-based filmmaker. Her directorial debut, the feature documentary *After Tiller*, premiered in the U.S. Documentary Competition at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival to critical acclaim. It was theatrically released in over 25 cities by Oscilloscope Laboratories and will have a television broadcast in 2014. After *Tiller* was supported by the Sundance Documentary Fund, the International Documentary Association, Chicken & Egg Pictures, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the Educational Foundation of America. From 2006 to 2008, Shane co-directed, produced and co-edited the feature documentary *Bi the Way*, which had its premiere at the SXSW film festival in 2008 and debuted on MTV's LOGO channel in summer 2009. Shane graduated from Wesleyan University in 2005 with a degree in Film Studies.

**Frederick Shanahan** (Editor) is a freelance film editor based in New York City. He has worked on several award-winning documentaries, including the Emmy-nominated feature *The City Dark*, which aired on PBS as part of the POV series in 2012, *Truck Farm*, and *The Search for General Tso*, premiering April 2014. He graduated from the Boston University College of Communication, magna cum laude, with a B.S. in Film and Television.

**Alexandra Nikolchev** (Co-producer) is an Emmy-nominated field producer, whose editing and producing credits include PBS and HBO documentaries.

**Ian Cheney** (Co-producer) is the director of the Emmy-nominated feature *The City Dark*, co-creator of the Peabody Award-winning *King Corn*, co-founder of the Americorps public service program FoodCorps, and a winner of the 2011 Heinz Award.