Wednesday, November 20, 2013, is the International Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR)

TDOR is a day to reflect on those who have been killed because of transphobia and hate. For those who are transgender, genderqueer, non-binary or significant others, friends, family and allies (SOFFAs), not remembering isn’t even a possibility. Because we know that when we leave the house, or when our loved ones leave the house, there is some chance that some person out there will decide our loved one’s gender is wrong or bad. We know there are people in the world, who think that violence will fix their own fears, and police who think our lives aren’t important, and courts that think panic is a legitimate reason for murder.

What we’d like to see instead is a day where we can’t remember the violence committed against people who live their genders despite transphobia, who believe in their own dignity and right to exist. What we’d like is a day when the faces of those who were brutally murdered for being who they are don’t flip through our minds as reminders of the fear we need to live with.

We all have privileges! We may be white, we may be cisgender, we may be educated; we may have money and health insurance and the possibility of getting a job without questions about our genders. Most of the transgender people we remembered had few of those things, or none of them; too many of the people who are killed every year are people of color, people who do sex work, people who have to decide between work that has sky-high risks and starving. For some transgender people, it is just the human desire to have company, or desire, or companionship, which makes them vulnerable to these kinds of attacks.

So while we remember those murdered, we want to celebrate them too. We see a transgender community filled with beautiful, engaged, and joyful people. We see people in love; we see people with careers and jobs and families and hopes. We see people with aspirations and confidence. What we see when we look around the transgender community is a great deal of joy. A kind of joy few people have really experienced this is the kind of joy that comes with relief, and with victory not just over the transphobic world we live in, but with the internalized transphobia all of us share, transgender and cisgender alike.

This statement is adapted from another piece originally written to honor the 2011 Transgender Day of Remembrance and is a portion of a 2011 talk delivered by Helen Boyd at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin.