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# Outstanding Voices: Marcy Coburn took a journey in 1992. It changed her life forever.

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*Editor's note: As part of our Business of Pride publication every year, the Business Times honors a dozen or more Outstanding Voices honorees. Click here to read about our other 2021 honorees.*

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## Marcy Coburn

*Senior director of creative and placemaking for Pier 70, Brookfield Properties Development*

Marcy Coburn arrived at Pier 70 and Brookfield Properties Development just a few weeks before Covid-19 swept through the region and changed everything. Despite the constraints created by the pandemic, Coburn quickly established a weekly social media podcast to provide a connection between the team behind the massive real estate development and the wider community. In development terms, it's called "placemaking," but



SPENCER BROWN

Marcy Coburn, senior director of creative and placemaking for Pier 70, Brookfield Properties Development

it's something that she's been doing over her entire career — creating culture and building community and belonging through experiences. Prior to Brookfield, Coburn spent more than five years as CEO of CUESA, a nonprofit that operates the farmers' markets at San Francisco's Ferry Building and in the Mission District.

**When did you come out?** When I was 19 in 1992, I dropped out of community college with a friend and took a Greyhound bus across the country to hook up with the Walk Across America for Mother Earth. It was the 500th anniversary of Columbus' invasion of the Americas, and we walked from New York City to the Nevada nuclear test site where they were doing underground nuclear testing on Western Shoshone land. We protested for nine months in solidarity with indigenous people. In the summer of that year, I hitchhiked with all these women to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival and camped outside the gates and then snuck in, and that is where I had my first experience with a woman.

**Has the notion of placemaking always been something that you gravitated toward in your career?** I think the themes that have woven through everything that I've done have been people. I'm super extroverted. I love to bring people together, and in my personal life, one of my favorite things to do is to throw dinner parties. Luckily, we managed to host small outdoor dinner parties with our pod during Covid. My undergrad degree was in agricultural communication so that was tied to the land and ecology and connection with local and sustainable farming. You can't spend too much time thinking about farming without thinking about the food that is made from everything we grow, and that led me into the food world. I think all of this has led me here. At Pier 70, it's thinking about how people are going to experience this place that they haven't been able to access in over 100 years. The energy of Pier 70 is really unique and special, and I knew that when this opportunity came up, I wanted to be part of it.

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**Age:** 49

**Residence:** Oakland

**Education:** Bachelor's in agricultural communication, University of Georgia; High-Impact Leadership program, UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business

**Family:** Spouse, artist Sheri Lee Robinson, and pandemic puppy, Izzy

**Little known fact:** “I’m obsessed with Yacht Rock”

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**What’s your advice to young LGBTQ professionals and aspiring leaders in your field?** I think the biggest thing is to not hide your light under a bushel. If you are coming up in a corporation, your uniqueness is a huge asset to the company. Forward-thinking organizations understand that having a diverse workforce is a growth strategy. If you’re not getting that kind of support, leave. Don’t stick around and waste your glitter and fabulousness on a company that doesn’t see you as an asset. With the Black Lives Matter movement after the murder of George Floyd last year, a lot of companies realized that they needed to be more proactive in terms of bringing in more diverse workers and creating culture to support that. It’s a process, it takes a long time and there’s a lot of learning that has to happen.

**What would you say most needs to happen to achieve equal opportunity level the playing field?** There’s the Equality Act that has yet to pass Congress. There’s still 29 states that have yet to outlaw anti-LGBT discrimination. There’s still terrible anti-transgender bills. I’m very grateful for the right to marry — I was actually married in March of this year — so that feels wonderful, but there’s a lot left to do. I’d like to see more data about the number of LGBTQ people who are in senior leadership in various organizations and on boards of directors. Often, we see very binary gender stuff like men and women only. There’s not a lot of inclusion as far as the data show about trans people, queer people, what it’s like to be a masculine-presenting woman or a feminine-presenting man.

**Looking forward, are you more hopeful or fearful for the next generation?** I feel worried about social media and its impact on young LGBTQ people. But I also have so much hope for the young people I know who are nonbinary in their thinking and understanding that there are more than two genders and express that in different ways. And this isn’t just in the Bay Area! I have friends that have teenagers in other parts of the country and it’s universal.

**How has being resilient helped you in your life and professional journey?** One of the dictionary definitions of “resilience” is the ability of a material to return to its original form after being bent, compressed or stretched. A long time ago, they used to call people who were queer or LGBTQ “bent” and so I thought this describes my whole life. I don’t think I ever considered that resilience was a choice. I’ve never had any other choice than to just be myself.

**What experience or person most influenced your success as an LGBTQ leader?** My best friend of almost 40 years, performance artist Taylor Mac. Taylor’s work as an artist and as a friend has inspired me for decades. We grew up together in Stockton and would go driving to San Francisco in my shitty car and walk around and think about our future. We acknowledged at an early age that we were connected magical beings. It ended up that we were gay, but we didn’t know that then. It was about understanding that we were different and being there for each other. Taylor has won almost every major theater award in the world. He’s able to reach every type of audience and he’s extremely flamboyant and out there so that’s just amazingly inspiring.

**Diana K. Murphy**

Special Projects Editor  
*San Francisco Business Times*



