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Foreword by  
**EDMUND WHITE**



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**READER**



## THE STONEWALL READER

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# The Stonewall Reader

*Foreword by*  
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PENGUIN BOOKS



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## Foreword

There's something wonky and inappropriate about nearly every major protest event in history. The British inspired the Boston Tea Party because they wanted tax revenues to pay for battles they'd fought on behalf of their American colonies. When the French revolutionaries destroyed the Bastille, there were only seven prisoners in it, most of them aristocrats who came with pets, their own furniture, and hundreds of books. The Stonewall uprising protested a police raid on a Mafia-owned gay bar and dance spot that had no running water, where glasses were "washed" in filthy suds and reused, and which was "protected" by straight, extortionate Mafia goons.

But each of these uprisings came along at the right historical moment. Americans were fed up with taxation without representation. The French were protesting rising national debt, extremes in wealth and poverty, expensive foreign wars, and an autocratic government. And gays, who'd almost never resisted arrest, stood up for themselves at last.

There were many causes of this historic resistance. Throughout the early 1960s the city had shut down gay bars out of deference to tourists visiting the World's Fair, which was mainly designed to showcase American business; the power behind it was the Tammany Hall mayor Robert Wagner. But at the time of Stonewall, in that pre-internet age that was the main place for queers to meet, it seemed gay and lesbian bars were being left in peace. Everyone assumed Mayor John Lindsay was a nice guy because he looked like Kennedy.

The clientele of the Stonewall had gradually changed from white to black and Hispanic, kids who were used to fighting the cops. And

then it was very hot outside. And Judy Garland, the Pasionara of gay men, had died on June 22, 1969, from a Seconal overdose at age forty-seven and lay in state in Manhattan's Frank E. Campbell funeral home. The Stonewall riots began June 28 at three in the morning. They went on for three days and at times the whole of Sheridan Square was cordoned off. Most important, the sexual revolution, Black Power, and anti-Vietnam War demonstrations had shown the efficacy of protest.

The United States had gradually shifted from espousing a morality of duty to a newfound yen for self-fulfillment. Gone or going were the days of sacrificing one's own pleasure for the sake of conventional values; typical of the sixties were "alternative" publications such as *Screw* and *Hustler*, which urged their readers to indulge their secret desires. The Kinsey Reports had already reassured people, straight and gay, how many adults had at least experimented with non-procreative sex—even kinky sex! Black Power had replaced the class analysis of the left with the race analysis of the civil rights movement. War protesters in the days of the universal obligatory male draft had inspired the majority to oppose a war we apparently couldn't win, that didn't serve our national interests, and that had become the "killing fields" of thousands of soldiers. And we were seeing how effective those protests could be. The burgeoning women's movement was showing that "sisterhood is powerful," a preview of coming attractions in our American dialogue. Women prisoners locked up in the Jefferson Market prison (since razed) were shouting down their encouragement to the Stonewall protesters resisting the police.

Many if not most historians would argue that major events such as gay liberation are not sudden but gradual, incremental; as someone who lived through Stonewall I would claim that the uprising was decisive. Although there were small gay-rights groups such as the Mattachine Society (which first met under the name of Society of Fools—*mattacino* is the Italian word for a masked harlequin), most gay people (including this one) had hardly heard of them. Before Stonewall the prevailing theories of homosexuality—even among queers—were that we were sinners, criminals, or

mentally ill. There was a certain moment at a gay cocktail party in the 1950s, for instance, when we would all put down our martinis and sigh, “Gosh, we’re sick!” I spent some twenty years on the couch trying to go straight and was assured by my various shrinks that homosexuality was just a symptom of a deeper disorder (oppressive mother–absent father was a favorite, or being arrested in the “anal-aggressive stage”). Almost no one could see queerness as something along the normal spectrum of human (or animal) behavior. The Mormons were making deviant boys look at homoerotica and then submitting them to shock therapy. Priests were listening to tearful confessions before “consoling” their little sinners. Many Protestant sects were sending their homosexual minors to boot camp for “conversion therapy.” Three states still ban all forms of sodomy (including oral and anal sex), even among heterosexuals; a 2003 Supreme Court decision decriminalized homosexuality even among consenting adults in fourteen states.

The Stonewall uprising changed attitudes, first among lesbian and gay people. In January 1970 I moved to Rome for six months, and when I came back cavernous gay dance clubs, complete with go-go boys in white towels under black light, had suddenly sprung up.

The Gay Academic Union started in 1973 and lasted four years. Gay political groups formed. Pride marches were held in scores of cities on the anniversary of Stonewall (as I write, we’re approaching the fiftieth anniversary). Same-sex civil unions and then marriages were legalized. Openly lesbian and gay volunteers were accepted into the armed forces. In many places discrimination against lesbians and gays in the workplace and in housing became illegal.

These rights are precious and were hard-won by generations of activists. But the change in attitudes is parallel and nearly as important. I was engaged twice, hurt my fiancées, doubted all my impulses, feared a bitter and lonely old age (predicted on every side). Even today well-meaning heterosexuals lament that I’m considered a “gay author.” (Would they be equally shocked by a Jewish or African American writer? Oh, no, sorry. Philip Roth and Toni Morrison are “universal” authors.) When I was a kid I knew very few gay couples, and no one would have sided with queers who

wanted to adopt. When I worked for Time-Life from 1962 to 1970, I had to refer to my boyfriends as women; otherwise I would have been fired. My dad fired an employee because he was unmarried at thirty and wore cologne.

I suppose the horror stories bore everyone. I just want to finish with one observation: Because of the Stonewall uprising, people saw homosexuals no longer as criminals or sinners or mentally ill, but as something like members of a minority group. It was an oceanic change in thinking.

EDMUND WHITE

## Introduction

Twenty-five years ago, the New York Public Library presented the exhibition *Becoming Visible: The Legacy of Stonewall*, curated by Molly McGarry and Fred Wasserman, as well as an accompanying catalog. Planned to commemorate Stonewall 25, it was the first exhibition devoted to LGBTQ history by a major New York cultural institution. It had the highest attendance of any NYPL exhibition except the Dead Sea Scrolls. In my years working on LGBTQ collections at the library, I have had countless people tell me that the exhibition changed their lives because it was the first time they felt that their history was publicly embraced and treated with the seriousness it deserved. The exhibition was an opportunity to show the riches of the library's LGBTQ archives, which had then recently been acquired by farsighted curators in partnership with grassroots activists. Now with the fiftieth anniversary of Stonewall, the library is able to open those archives through this anthology to give contemporary readers insight into this pivotal era in LGBTQ history through firsthand accounts of the actual participants.

The Stonewall Inn, located at 53 Christopher Street in New York City, began as a teahouse, Bonnie's Stone Wall, in 1930, and later evolved into a restaurant. After a fire destroyed the interior in the early 1960s, the Stonewall was reopened by Fat Tony Lauria as a gay bar. Part of a network of Mafia-controlled, illegal gay clubs and after-hours joints in the Village (like the Bon Soir, the Tenth of Always, and Kooky's), the Stonewall was operated as a private club, rather than a publicly open bar, to evade the control of the State Liquor Authority. Every weekend patrons paid three dollars and signed the club register—often as Judy Garland or Donald Duck—to get into the Stonewall, drink watered-down liquor, and dance to the

music of the Ronettes and the Shangri-Las. Despite the burnt interior, dirty glasses, and surly staff, the Stonewall—one of the few gay clubs in the Village where patrons could dance—drew a devoted young clientele. Many cross-dressed, wearing makeup or their own personal mix of men's and women's attire.

The police routinely raided the Stonewall, but the management, always mysteriously tipped off in advance, would turn up the lights to warn the crowd to stop any open displays of affection, slow dancing, or use of illicit drugs. According to most historians, the Stonewall's management bribed the police for protection, and the raids were merely for show. But on Tuesday, June 24, 1969, there was another kind of raid, organized by the NYPD's First Division, rather than the usual and local Sixth Precinct. When the club was back up and running a few days later, the police decided to go in again on Saturday, June 28, and shut it down for good.

The police were accustomed to handling a large gay crowd with only a handful of officers, but this night the raid went very differently. Rather than leave, a crowd of patrons and onlookers gathered in front of the bar and waited for their friends held inside to be released. When the police van came to take away those who had been arrested, the crowd fought back, forcing the police into the bar. The riot gathered force from onlookers, who turned on the barricaded bar with garbage cans and fire. The drag queens were said to have given the police both the fiercest resistance and a dose of humor, facing them down in a chorus line as they sang, "We are the Stonewall Girls . . ." The crowd was controlled and dispersed in the early hours of Saturday morning, only to reemerge later that night as several thousand people took to the streets chanting, "Gay power!" and "Liberate Christopher Street!" Riots and demonstrations continued throughout the following week. In the end, the arrests and damage were minimal. What shocked both gays and the straight establishment was that queers had openly fought back.

That is the story in a nutshell. Everything else has become the stuff of queer legend and debate. First, we cannot agree on what to call this series of events. Was it a "riot" or an "uprising"? The

activists and reporters at the time called it a riot, eager to compare it to the many other historic riots of the 1960s, such as those against racial oppression in Watts, Newark, Detroit, and Harlem. Many later historians and critics have preferred to call it an uprising, insisting either that the level of violence and the size of the crowd did not warrant the use of the term *riot* or, conversely, that calling it a riot denigrated the importance of the events. Stonewall is often marked as the beginning of the LGBTQ civil rights movement, but that is of course not true. LGBTQ people had been organizing politically since at least the 1950s, with the emergence of organizations such as the Mattachine Society, the Daughters of Bilitis, the Janus Society, the Society for Individual Rights, and the Erickson Educational Foundation. Although these organizations were small, there were chapters of the fledgling groups across the United States by the mid-1960s. These organizations had magazines and conventions, and even staged demonstrations at the Pentagon, the White House, and Philadelphia's Independence Hall. Some say that Stonewall was the first time LGBTQ people fought back, which is also not true. Stonewall was preceded by earlier queer revolts such as the Cooper Do-nuts Riot in Los Angeles in 1959, the Dewey's restaurant sit-in in Philadelphia in 1965, the Compton's Cafeteria Riot in San Francisco in 1966, and the protests against the raid of the Black Cat Tavern in Los Angeles in 1967, among many others. Scholars, participants, and the interested public also debate how many days the uprising lasted and who threw the first brick, the first bottle, or the first punch. And more, beyond any of these questions we wonder what these events that transpired fifty years ago mean to us today.

With all these contradictions, scholars and documentarians have struggled to sort out the truth. In his pioneering account, *Stonewall*, historian Martin Duberman provides an inside view of the lead-up to and impact of the uprising through the lives of six LGBTQ activists. David Carter, in his thorough history, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, painstakingly compares the testimony of eyewitnesses in order to reconstruct the events. They have been followed by numerous documentarians and everyday



people who have tried to piece together what happened, why, and what it ultimately means for LGBTQ people and the world. Rather than provide another closed narrative of these tumultuous events, my purpose with this anthology has been to allow the reader to sort out these mysteries for themselves by reading the memoirs and testimony of the participants and those immediately touched by these historic events.

The anthology has been organized into three main sections: before, during, and after the Stonewall uprising. In the “Before Stonewall” section, I have attempted to provide a range of narratives that give insight into what it felt like to be LGBTQ in the 1950s and ’60s, as well as give an inkling of the range of activism that was emerging across the country before the uprising. We have focused on but not limited ourselves to New York City. Given the tremendous range of stories, this selection cannot be representative, but only hopes to demonstrate a breadth of experiences and introduce some key LGBTQ political figures of the time, such as Barbara Gittings, Frank Kameny, and Del Martin, as well as some possibly less well-known figures such as Ernestine Eckstein and Mario Martino. There are many challenges to producing an anthology like this one, the first being copyright. So many LGBTQ texts of the midtwentieth century are in publishing limbo. The texts are protected by copyright but have no clear representation that can authorize republishing them. This is particularly true of LGBTQ magazines, which were the main avenue for communication and community building. But an even greater challenge has been the way the LGBTQ archives we have inherited have already been structured by the exclusion from the record of the voices of people of color. The movement’s own choice of the Stonewall uprising as a symbol for LGBTQ struggles for liberation has in many ways skewed the story to focus on the experiences of urban gay white men. In this anthology, I have endeavored to shift the narrative to a wider context and to expand what does and doesn’t count as a Stonewall memory.

In order to understand this era, we have to understand that the history of sexuality and gender does not follow an even and upward

march of progress toward freedom. Throughout history there have been cycles of freedom and repression. Same-sex relationships were discreetly tolerated in nineteenth-century America in the form of romantic friendships, but the twentieth century brought increasing legal and medical regulation of homosexuality, which was considered a dangerous illness. At the same time, there was increasing societal awareness of and anxiety about transgender and gender-nonconforming people as gender-confirmation surgery became available. This change in attitude was accompanied by pockets of resistance, spaces that gays, lesbians, and transgender people carved out for their self-expression. Sometimes these spaces were hidden, like the bars in Greenwich Village and Harlem that were frequented only by those in the know. Sometimes they were in plain sight, like the homoerotic subtexts and in-jokes of Hollywood movies. The repression of homosexuality reached its peak in the 1950s with the McCarthy era. During the paranoia of the Cold War, gay men and lesbians were seen as a corrupt lurking menace, easily used as pawns by communists.

Gays and lesbians began to organize during the 1950s with the homophile movement but were hampered by the lack of a political language with which to express their experience, as they were neither a class nor an ethnicity but instead were considered victims of a moral and medical defect. The activists of this era fought for civil rights framed as inclusion in the society at large, focusing on employment rights and military service. As LGBTQ people struggled to organize and represent themselves, the United States was torn by a succession of political struggles—the African American civil rights movement, the women’s movement, protests against the Vietnam War, and the emergence of the hippie youth subculture—that transformed the possibilities of political organizing in the United States. The narratives in this first section speak to this mix of repression and resistance, as well as the growing range of political forces inspiring LGBTQ communities.

In the second section, I attempt to provide the wide range of memories of the Stonewall uprising itself. Who exactly was and was not at the Stonewall uprising is probably the most debated question

in both the scholarship and popular opinion. Even the eyewitnesses disagree about who was there. Given that the event took place over more than five days and involved thousands of people, we will probably never know definitively who was there. For this reason, I have not attempted to police these narratives. I have taken witnesses at their word that they were there. The section begins with the news reportage of the events: Mattachine activist Dick Leitsch's account, "The Hairpin Drop Heard Around the World," which ran in the *New York Mattachine Newsletter*; and the reportage by Howard Smith and Lucian Truscott IV, which ran in the *Village Voice*. These articles were key in framing the events for the public and appear to have structured participants' memories as well. There then follows a wide range of testimony about the uprising from possibly familiar figures such as Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, Martin Boyce, and Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, as well as LGBTQ figures we might not realize were personally touched by the Stonewall uprising, such as Holly Woodlawn and Jayne County. In order to preserve the voices of the subjects, transcriptions remain faithful to the original interviews as much as possible, only correcting errors in spelling or punctuation in the transcriptions.

If the Stonewall uprising was not the beginning of LGBTQ political activism and not the first time LGBTQ people fought back against police repression, then why was it singled out as a defining moment in our history? The stories of the participants make it clear that it marked the convergence of homophile-era activism with the energy and vision of the civil rights, antiwar, and counterculture movements that were transforming the country. The patrons at the Stonewall weren't card-carrying Mattachine members. They were inspired by the many resistances to accepted authority that were taking place in the culture at large. Although the Stonewall uprising was spontaneous, it was used by both seasoned and new LGBTQ activists as a symbol of a new revolution. The small flames of resistance that LGBTQ activists had been tending and fanning for decades finally erupted into a mass political movement.

In the final section of this book, I provide a selection of personal accounts of the years following Stonewall and the tremendous

explosion of activist energy that resulted from the uprising. I have included memoirs and manifestos by LGBTQ activists in New York City as well as in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Philadelphia. Today's LGBTQ movement grew out of the activist organizations that emerged in the fertile and tumultuous year that followed Stonewall. Organizations such as the Gay Liberation Front, Gay Activists Alliance, and the Radicalesbians quickly sprang up in the wake of the uprising and tackled LGBTQ activism in a whole new way. Rather than struggle merely for societal acceptance, they called for a complete transformation of the society as a whole, demanding not just equality but liberation. Veteran activists pursued their work with a renewed courage and tenacity, tackling oppressive institutions such as the psychiatric profession. The emerging political movements all sent small groups of activists on road trips to spread the word. Activists around the country were inspired by the emerging revolutionary vision in LGBTQ politics and quickly adopted its new language. Chapters sprang up across the country, and many outlived the original groups in New York City. These groups in turn fought for civil rights and liberation in their home communities. The 1970s became a gay and lesbian renaissance with its own literature, music, politics, and erotic presence. LGBTQ activists won major political victories, such as the removal of homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's classification of mental disorders, and began to apply public pressure to combat negative stereotypes.

The excitement and energy of the times are clear in these narratives, but it is also clear that the differences among LGBTQ experiences quickly became apparent in these new movements. Lesbian activists soon tired of the sexism of their gay male political colleagues. Transgender activists were inspired by the gay liberation movement, but many gender-essentialist lesbians and gay men attempted to silence them and push them out of the movement. African American, Latina/Latino, and Asian American activists critiqued the racism of the movement and sought to create new cultural spaces for LGBTQ people of color. Because the post-Stonewall political movements were inspired by anti-racist,

feminist, and anti-imperialist politics, it was natural that these critical lenses would be used to analyze LGBTQ politics themselves. This era gave birth to political strategies, frameworks, critiques, and disagreements that continue to inform LGBTQ politics today.

Clearly understanding that they were making history, these activists also recognized the need to recover the hidden history of LGBTQ people. Among the many activist groups that worked to archive this history was the International Gay Information Center (IGIC), which grew out of the History Committee of the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA). The IGIC archives operated as a community-based repository until 1988, when the organization's directors gave the collection to the New York Public Library. These archives, along with other archives and collections subsequently donated to the library, comprehensively document the political struggles in New York City since the 1950s and have made NYPL's one of the most important archives of LGBT history in the United States.

These NYPL archives have grown in the ensuing years to include the papers of pioneering activists such as Barbara Gittings, Kay Tobin Lahusen, Vito Russo, and Joseph Beam; the manuscripts of LGBTQ writers including Walt Whitman, May Sarton, and James Baldwin; as well as drag performers including Charles Pierce, Charles Busch, and Sylvester. The materials for this anthology, with two notable exceptions, have been drawn from this rich archive. The oral history archives of Eric Marcus have been an important resource for the anthology, providing the transcripts of interviews with Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, Martin Boyce, Randy Wicker, and Morty Manford. Marcus's archive of interviews was assembled to support the writing of his book *Making Gay History* and lives on as the *Making Gay History* podcast. The library is currently partnering with the NYC Trans Oral History Project to document the lives of trans people in New York, which has made it possible to preserve and present the stories of Jay London Toole and Miss Major Griffin-Gracy. The archives of Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin Lahusen provided the narratives of Gittings, as well as of Craig Rodwell. The rich research files of Martin Duberman supplied

the narrative of Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, as well as many pointers. Lastly, the extensive book collection in the IGIC and the LGBT periodical collection provided the bulk of the materials.

When I first started working with the LGBTQ collections of the library, I just happened to be in the right place at the right time. I was an early-career librarian who had chanced to be a part of the AIDS activist organization ACT UP, as well as the gay liberation movement the Radical Faeries. The library was beginning a fund-raising initiative to help promote and preserve these LGBTQ history collections and needed someone who could speak to their importance. In the ensuing years it has been my tremendous privilege to meet and work with several generations of pioneering LGBTQ activists, historians, and artists, some of whom are included in this book. I have been continually humbled and awed by their visionary courage. These are people who have literally changed our world. The most important lesson that I have hopefully learned working with these archives is that they are people's lives. They are not just boxes of papers and magazines; they are people's memories, hopes, and dreams that have been entrusted to us. It is my sincere hope that reading these stories will bring you closer to the generations of LGBTQ activists who precede us and that it will help to fuel future struggles for liberation.

JASON BAUMANN

# Suggestions for Further Exploration

## WEBSITES

ACT UP Oral History Project. <http://www.actuporalhistory.org/>.  
Digital Transgender Archive. <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/>.  
Making Gay History: The Podcast. <https://makinggayhistory.com/>.  
NYC Trans Oral History Project. <https://www.nyctransoralhistory.org/>.  
OutHistory. <http://outhistory.org/>.

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# BEFORE STONEWALL

## AUDRE LORDE

*Caribbean American poet, scholar, activist, and librarian Audre Lorde was a pivotal figure in LGBTQ and feminist literature and politics in the 1970s and '80s. In this selection from her "biomythography" Zami, Lorde remembers the challenges and loneliness of being a young, black lesbian in New York City's Village neighborhood in the 1950s.*

### From *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*

I remember how being young and Black and gay and lonely felt. A lot of it was fine, feeling I had the truth and the light and the key, but a lot of it was purely hell.

There were no mothers, no sisters, no heroes. We had to do it alone, like our sister Amazons, the riders on the loneliest outposts of the kingdom of Dahomey. We, young and Black and fine and gay, sweated out our first heartbreaks with no school or office chums to share that confidence over lunch hour. Just as there were no rings to make tangible the reason for our happy secret smiles, there were no names nor reason given or shared for the tears that messed up the lab reports or the library bills.

We were good listeners, and never asked for double dates, *but didn't we know the rules?* Why did we always seem to think friendships between women were important enough to *care* about? Always we moved in a necessary remoteness that made "What did you do this weekend?" seem like an impertinent question. We discovered and explored our attention to women alone, sometimes in secret, sometimes in defiance, sometimes in little pockets that almost touched ("Why are those little Black girls always either whispering together or fighting?"), but always alone, against a greater aloneness. We did it cold turkey, and although it resulted in

some pretty imaginative tough women when we survived, too many of us did not survive at all.

I remember Muff, who sat on the same seat in the same dark corner of the Pony Stable bar drinking the same gin year after year. One day she slipped off onto the floor and died of a stroke right there between the stools. We found out later her real name was Josephine.

During the fifties in the Village, I didn't know the few other Black women who were visibly gay at all well. Too often we found ourselves sleeping with the same white women. We recognized ourselves as exotic sister-outsiders who might gain little from banding together. Perhaps our strength might lay in our fewness, our rarity. That was the way it was Downtown. And Uptown, meaning the land of Black people, seemed very far away and hostile territory.

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Diane was fat, and Black, and beautiful, and knew it long before it became fashionable to think so. Her cruel tongue was used to great advantage, spilling out her devastatingly uninhibited wit to demolish anyone who came too close to her; that is, when she wasn't busy deflowering the neighborhood's resident virgins. One day I noticed her enormous bosom which matched my own and it felt quite comforting rather than competitive. It was clothed in a CCNY sweatshirt, and I realized in profound shock that someone else besides me in the Village gay-girl scene was a closet student at one of the Uptown (meaning past 14th Street) colleges. We would rather have died than mention classes, or tests, or any books other than those everyone else was discussing. This was the fifties and the gulf between the Village gay scene and the college crowd was sharper and far more acrimonious than any town-gown war.

There were not enough of us. But we surely tried. I remember thinking for a while that I was the only Black lesbian living in the Village, until I met Felicia. Felicia, with the face of a spoiled nun, skinny and sharp brown, sat on my sofa on Seventh Street, with her

enormous eyelashes that curled back upon themselves twice. She was bringing me a pair of Siamese cats that had terrorized her junkie friends who were straight and lived on a houseboat with the two cats, until they brought their new baby home from the hospital and both cats went bananas back and forth all over the boat, jumping over everything including the box that the baby screamed in, because Siamese cats are very jealous. So, instead of drowning the cats, they gave them to Felicia, whom I ran into having a beer at the Bagatelle that night, and when Muriel mentioned I liked cats, Flee insisted on bringing them over to my house right then and there. She sat on my sofa with her box of cats and her curly eyelashes and I thought to myself, “if she must wear false eyelashes you’d think she’d make them less obviously false.”

We soon decided that we were really sisters, which was much more than friends or buddies, particularly when we discovered while reminiscing about the bad days that we had gone to the same catholic school for six months in the first grade.

I remembered her as the tough little kid in 1939 who came into class in the middle of winter, disturbing our neat tight boredom and fear, bringing her own. Sister Mary of Perpetual Help seated her beside me because I had a seat to myself in the front row, being both bad-behaved and nearsighted. I remembered this skinny little kid who made my life hell. She pinched me all day long, all the time, until she vanished sometime around St. Swithin’s Day, a godsent reward, I thought, for what, I couldn’t imagine, but it almost turned me back to god and prayer again.

Felicia and I came to love each other very much, even though our physical relationship was confined to cuddling. We were both part of the “freaky” bunch of lesbians who weren’t into role-playing, and who the butches and femmes, Black and white, disparaged with the term Ky-Ky, or AC/DC. Ky-Ky was the same name that was used for gay-girls who slept with johns for money. Prostitutes.

Flee loved to snuggle in bed, but sometimes she hurt my feelings by saying I had shaggy breasts. And too, besides, Flee and I were always finding ourselves in bed together with other people, usually white women.

Then I thought we were the only gay Black women in the world, or at least in the Village, which at the time was a state of mind extending all the way from river to river below 14th Street, and in pockets throughout the area still known as the Lower East Side.

I had heard tales from Flee and others about the proper Black ladies who came downtown on Friday nights after the last show at Small's Paradise to find a gay-girl to go muff diving with and bring her back up to Convent Avenue to sleep over while their husbands went hunting, fishing, golfing, or to an Alpha's weekend. But I only met one once, and her pressed hair and all too eagerly interested husband who had accompanied her this particular night to the Bagatelle, where I met her over a daiquiri and a pressed knee, turned me off completely. And this was pretty hard to do in those days because it seemed an eternity between warm beds in the cold mornings seven flights up on Seventh Street. So I told her that I never traveled above 23rd Street. I could have said 14th Street, but she had already found out that I went to college; therefore I thought 23rd was safe enough because CCNY Downtown was there. That was the last bastion of working-class academia allowed.

Downtown in the gay bars I was a closet student and an invisible Black. Uptown at Hunter I was a closet dyke and a general intruder. Maybe four people all together knew I wrote poetry, and I usually made it pretty easy for them to forget.

It was not that I didn't have friends, and good ones. There was a loose group of young lesbians, white except for Flee and I, who hung out together, apart from whatever piece of the straight world we each had a separate place in. We not only believed in the reality of sisterhood, that word which was to be so abused two decades later, but we also tried to put it into practice, with varying results. We all cared for and about each other, sometimes with more or less understanding, regardless of who was entangled with whom at any given time, and there was always a place to sleep and something to eat and a listening ear for anyone who wandered into the crew. And there was always somebody calling you on the telephone to interrupt the fantasies of suicide. That is as good a working definition of friend as most.



However imperfectly, we tried to build a community of sorts where we could, at the very least, survive within a world we correctly perceived to be hostile to us; we talked endlessly about how best to create that mutual support which twenty years later was being discussed in the women's movement as a brand-new concept. Lesbians were probably the only Black and white women in New York City in the fifties who were making any real attempt to communicate with each other; we learned lessons from each other, the values of which were not lessened by what we did not learn.

For both Flee and me, it seemed that loving women was something that other Black women just didn't do. And if they did, then it was in some fashion and in some place that was totally inaccessible to us, because we could never find them. Except for Saturday nights in the Bagatelle, where neither Flee nor I was stylish enough to be noticed.

(My straight Black girlfriends, like Jean and Crystal, either ignored my love for women, considered it interestingly avant-garde, or tolerated it as just another example of my craziness. It was allowable as long as it wasn't too obvious and didn't reflect upon them in any way. At least my being gay kept me from being a competitor for whatever men happened to be upon their horizons. It also made me much more reliable as a confidante. I never asked for anything more.)



But only on the full moon or every other Wednesday was I ever convinced that I really wanted it different. A bunch of us—maybe Nicky and Joan and I—would all be standing around having a beer at the Bagatelle, trying to decide whether to inch onto the postage-stamp dance floor for a slow intimate fish, garrison belt to pubis and rump to rump (but did we really want to get that excited after a long weekend with work tomorrow?), when I'd say sorry but I was tired and would have to leave now, which in reality meant I had an already late paper for english due the next day and needed to work on it all that night.

That didn't happen too often because I didn't go to the Bag very much. It was the most popular gay-girl's bar in the Village, but I hated beer, and besides the bouncer was always asking me for my ID to prove I was twenty-one, even though I was older than the other women with me. Of course "you can never tell with Colored people." And we would all rather die than have to discuss the fact that it was because I was Black, since, of course, gay people weren't racists. After all, didn't they know what it was like to be oppressed?

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Sometimes we'd pass Black women on Eighth Street—*the invisible but visible sisters*—or in the Bag or at Laurel's, and our glances might cross, but we never looked into each other's eyes. We acknowledged our kinship by passing in silence, looking the other way. Still, we were always on the lookout, Flee and I, for that telltale flick of the eye, that certain otherwise prohibited openness of expression, that definiteness of voice which would suggest, I think she's gay. *After all, doesn't it take one to know one?*

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I was gay and Black. The latter fact was irrevocable: armor, mantle, and wall. Often, when I had the bad taste to bring that fact up in a conversation with other gay-girls who were not Black, I would get the feeling that I had in some way breached some sacred bond of gayness, a bond which I always knew was not sufficient for me.

This was not to deny the closeness of our group, nor the mutual aid of those insane, glorious, and contradictory years. It is only to say that I was acutely conscious—from the ID "problem" at the Bag on Friday nights to the summer days at Gay Head Beach, where I was the only one who wouldn't worry about burning—that my relationship as a Black woman to our shared lives was different from theirs, and would be, gay or straight. The question of acceptance had a different weight for me.

In a paradoxical sense, once I accepted my position as different from the larger society as well as from any single sub-society—Black

or gay—I felt I didn’t have to try so hard. To be accepted. To look femme. To be straight. To look straight. To be proper. To look “nice.” To be liked. To be loved. To be approved. What I didn’t realize was how much harder I had to try merely to stay alive, or rather, to stay human. How much stronger a person I became in that trying.

But in this plastic, antihuman society in which we live, there have never been too many people buying fat Black girls born almost blind and ambidextrous, gay or straight. Unattractive, too, or so the ads in *Ebony* and *Jet* seemed to tell me. Yet I read them anyway, in the bathroom, on the newsstand, at my sister’s house, whenever I got a chance. It was a furtive reading, but it was an affirmation of some part of me, however frustrating.

If nobody’s going to dig you too tough anyway, it really doesn’t matter so much what you dare to explore. I had already begun to learn that when I left my parents’ house.

Like when your Black sisters on the job think you’re crazy and collect money between themselves to buy you a hot comb and straightening iron on their lunch hour and stick it anonymously into your locker in the staff room, so that later when you come down for a coffee break and open your locker the damn things fall out on the floor with a clatter and all ninety-five percent of your library coworkers who are very very white want to know what it’s all about.

Like when your Black brother calls you a ball-buster and tricks you up into his apartment and tries to do it to you against the kitchen cabinets just, as he says, to take you down a peg or two, when all the time you’d only gone up there to begin with fully intending to get a little in the first place (because all the girls I knew who were possibilities were too damn complicating, and I was plain and simply horny as hell). I finally got out of being raped, although not mauled, by leaving behind a ring and a batch of lies, and it was the first time in my life since I’d left my parents’ house that I was in a physical situation which I couldn’t handle physically—in other words, the bastard was stronger than I was. It was an instantaneous consciousness-raiser.

As I say, when the sisters think you're crazy and embarrassing; and the brothers want to break you open to see what makes you work inside; and the white girls look at you like some exotic morsel that has just crawled out of the walls onto their plate (but don't they love to rub their straight skirts up against the edge of your desk in the college literary magazine office after class); and the white boys all talk either money or revolution but can never quite get it up—then it doesn't really matter too much if you have an Afro long before the word even existed.

Pearl Primus, the African American dancer, had come to my high school one day and talked about African women after class, and how beautiful and natural their hair looked curling out into the sun, and as I sat there listening (one of fourteen Black girls in Hunter High School) I thought, that's the way god's mother must have looked and I want to look like that too so help me god. In those days I called it a natural, and kept calling it natural when everybody else called it crazy. It was a strictly homemade job done by a Sufi Muslim on 125th Street, trimmed with the office scissors and looking pretty raggedy. When I came home from school that day my mother beat my behind and cried for a week.

Even for years afterward white people would stop me on the street or particularly in Central Park and ask if I was Odetta, a Black folk singer whom I did not resemble at all except that we were both big Black beautiful women with natural heads.



*Besides my father, I am the darkest one in my family and I've worn my hair natural since I finished high school.*

*Once I moved to East Seventh Street, every morning that I had the fifteen cents, I would stop into the Second Avenue Griddle on the corner of St. Marks Place on my way to the subway and school and buy an english muffin and coffee. When I didn't have the money, I would just have coffee. It was a tiny little counter place run by an old Jewish man named Sol who'd been a seaman (among other things) and Jimmy, who was Puerto Rican and washed dishes*

*and who used to remind Sol to save me the hard englishes on Monday; I could have them for a dime. Toasted and dripping butter, those english muffins and coffee were frequently the high point of my day, and certainly enough to get me out of bed many mornings and into the street on that long walk to the Astor Place subway. Some days it was the only reason to get up, and lots of times I didn't have money for anything else. For over eight years, we shot a lot of bull over that counter, and exchanged a lot of ideas and daily news, and most of my friends knew who I meant when I talked about Jimmy and Sol. Both guys saw my friends come and go and never said a word about my people, except once in a while to say, "your girlfriend was in here; she owes me a dime and tell her don't forget we close exactly at seven."*

*So on the last day before I finally moved away from the Lower East Side after I got my master's from library school, I went in for my last english muffin and coffee and to say goodbye to Sol and Jimmy in some unemotional and acceptable-to-me way. I told them both I'd miss them and the old neighborhood, and they said they were sorry and why did I have to go? I told them I had to work out of the city, because I had a fellowship for Negro students. Sol raised his eyebrows in utter amazement and said, "Oh? I didn't know you was cullud!"*

*I went around telling that story for a while, although a lot of my friends couldn't see why I thought it was funny. But this is all about how very difficult it is at times for people to see who or what they are looking at, particularly when they don't want to.*

*Or maybe it does take one to know one.*

## JOHN RECHY

*Mexican American writer John Rechy has poetically chronicled the intimate lives of sex workers, gay men, and transgender people since the 1960s. He was arrested in the Cooper Do-nuts Riot in Los Angeles in 1959, which was an important predecessor to Stonewall. In this chapter from his 1963 autobiographical novel, City of Night, Rechy describes cruising in New York City and reading at the New York Public Library.*

### From *City of Night*

The world of Times Square was a world which I was certain I had sought out willingly—not a world which had summoned me. And because I believed that, its lure, for me, was much more powerful.

I flung myself into it.

Summer had come angrily into New York with the impact of a panting animal. Relentless hot nights follow scorching afternoons. Trains grinding along the purgatorial subway tunnels (compressing the heat ferociously, while at times, on the lurching cars, a crew of Negro urchins dance appropriately to the jungle-rhythmed bongos) expel the crowds—From All Points—at the Times Square stop. . . . And the streets are jammed with sweating faces.

The chilled hustling of winter now becomes the easy hustling of summer.

At the beginning of the warm days, the corps of newyork cops feels the impending surge of street activity, and for a few days the newspapers are full of reports of raids: UNDESIRABLES NABBED. The cops scour Times Square. But as the summer days proceed in sweltering intensity, the cops relent, as if themselves bogged down by the heat. Then they merely walk up and down the streets telling you to move on, move on.

Inevitably you're back in the same spot.

For me, a pattern which would guide my life on the streets had already emerged clearly.

I would never talk to anyone first. I would merely wait at the pickup places for someone to talk to me—while, about me, I would see squads of other youngmen aggressively approaching the obvious street-scores. My inability to talk first was an aspect of that same hunger for attention whose effects I had felt even in El Paso—the motive which had sent me away from that girl who had climbed Cristo Rey, long ago, with me: I had sensed her yet-unspoken demands for the very attention which I needed, and she had sensed them in me too, I am certain. . . . And so, in the world of males on the streets, it was *I* who would be the desired in those furtive relationships, without desiring back.

Sex for me became the mechanical reaction of This on one side, That on the other. And the boundary must not be crossed. Of course, there were times when a score would indicate he expected more of me. Those times, inordinately depressed, I would walk out on him instantly. Immediately, I must find others who would accept me on my own terms.

From the beginning, I had become aware of overtones of defensive derision aimed by some scores at those youngmen they picked up for the very masculinity they would later disparage—as if convinced, or needfully proclaiming their conviction, that the more masculine a hustler, the more his masculinity is a subterfuge: “And when we got into bed, that tough butch number—*he* turned over on his stomach and *I* . . .” a score had told me about a very masculine youngman I had seen on the streets. Later, I would hear that story more and more often. Whether that was true or not of the others, with me, there were things which categorically I would not—must not—do to score. To reciprocate in any way for the money would have violated the craving for the manifestation of desire toward me. It would have compromised my needs. . . . The money which I got in exchange for sex was a token indication of one-way desire: that I was wanted enough to be paid for, on my own terms.



Yet with that childhood-tampered ego poised flimsily on a structure as wavering and ephemeral as that of the streets (and a further irony: that it was only here that I could be surfeited, if anywhere), it needed more and more reassurance, in numbers: a search for reassurance which at times would backfire sharply, insidiously wounding that devouring narcissism.

In a bar with two men from out of town who had come to explore, on vacation, this make-out world of Times Square, I agreed to meet them later at their hotel room in the East 20s. When I got there that night—and after I had knocked loudly several times—the door opened cautiously on a dark room. One of the men peeked out, said, hurriedly in order to close the door quickly: “I’m sorry but we’ve got someone else now; let’s make it tomorrow.”

But there were others to feed that quickly starved craving.

In theater balconies; the act sometimes executed in the last rows, or along the dark stairways. . . . In movie heads—while someone watched out for an intruder, body fusing with mouth hurriedly—momentarily stifling that sense of crushing aloneness that the world manifests each desperate moment of the day, and which only the liberation of Orgasm seemed then to be able to vanquish, if only momentarily. . . . Behind the statue in Bryant park, figures silhouetted uncaringly in the unstoppable moments. . . .

Still, for me, there were those days of returning to what had once constituted periods of relative calmness, in my earlier years, when—to Escape!—I would read greedily. . . . Now, at that library on Fifth Avenue, I would try often to shut my ears to the echoes of that world roaring outside, immediately beyond these very walls. Again, I would read for hours. And this would be a part of the recurring pattern, when impulsively I would get a job, leave the streets, return to those books to which I had fled as a child. But because there would always be, too, that boiling excitement to be in that world which had brought me here—and, equally, the powerful childhood obsession with guilt which threatened at times to smother me—emotionally I was constantly on a seesaw.

And I began to sense that this journey away from a remote childhood window was a kind of rebellion against an innocence

which nothing in the world justified.

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In the library one night as I sit in the reading room surrounded by serene-masked people like relics from a distant world, a handsome youngman said hello to me. He sat at the same table. Noticing that he kept smiling and looking at me—at the same time that I felt his leg sliding against mine—I left. Sharply, I resented that youngman. His gesture had an implied attraction within the world of mutually interested men. While I could easily hang out with other youngmen hustling the same streets (although, since Pete, I seldom did for more than a few minutes, preferring to be alone), with them there was a knowledge—verbally proclaimed—that we were hunting scores, not each other. With this youngman just now, there had been the indication that he felt he could attract me to him as clearly as he had been attracted to me. . . .

The youngman followed me outside. As I cut across Bryant Park, I heard his steps quicken to approach me.

“I’d—like to meet you,” he said, the last words hurried as if he had rehearsed the sentence in order to be able to speak it.

“I’m going to go eat now,” I said, avoiding even looking at him.

“All right if I sit with you and just talk?” he asked me. He was masculine in appearance, in actions. He could not have been over 20. But already there was a steady, revealing gaze in his eyes.

We went to a cafeteria. As we sat there, he told me he was a student at a college; he lived with his parents. On weekends he worked at the library. . . . Throughout his conversation, there were subtle references to the homosexual scene, which I didn’t acknowledge. . . . Afterward, for about an hour, talking easily, we walked along the river.

“I’d like to go to bed with you,” he said bluntly. “We could rent a room somewhere.”

Remembering Pete with a sense of utter helplessness, and surprising myself because of the gentleness with which I answered this youngman, I said:

“You’ve got me all wrong.”

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In the following days (on this unfloating island with that life that never sleeps—in this city that seems to generate its energy from all the small, sleepy towns of America, sapped by this huge lodestone: the fugitives lured here by an emotional insomnia: gathered into like or complementary groups: in this dazzling disdainfully heaven-piercing city), in those following days, I discovered Third Avenue, the East 50s, in the early morning, where figures camped flagrantly in the streets in a parody stag line; the languid “Hi” floating into the dark, the feigned unconcern of the subsequent shrug when you don’t stop. . . .

And there was Howard Thomson’s restaurant on 8th Street in the near-dawn hours. They gathered then for the one last opportunity before the rising sun expelled them, bringing the Sunday families out for breakfast.

I discovered the bars: on the west side, the east side, in the Village; one in Queens—appropriately—where males danced with males, holding each other intimately, male leading, male following—and it was in that bar that I first saw flagrantly painted men congregate and where a queen boy-girl camped openly with a cop. . . . But because most of those bars attracted large numbers of youngmen who went there to meet others like themselves for mutual, nightlong, unpaid sex sharing—or for the prospect of an “affair”—the bars made me nervous then, and, largely, I avoided them.

*The restlessness welled insatiable inside me.*

I discovered the jungle of Central Park—between the 60s and 70s, on the west side. In the afternoons, Sundays especially, a parade of hunters prowled that area—or they would sit or lie on the grass waiting for that day’s contact. Even in the brilliant white blaze of newyork sun, it was possible to make it, right there, in the tree-secluded areas.

At night they sat along the benches, in the fringes of the park. Or they strolled with their leashed dogs along the walks. . . . The more courageous ones penetrated the park, around the lake, near a little hill: hoods, hobos, hustlers, homosexuals. Hunting. Young teenage gangs lurk threatening among the trees. Occasionally the cops come by, almost timidly, in pairs, flashing their lights; and the rustling of bushes precedes the quick scurrying of feet along the paths.

Unexpectedly at night you may come upon scenes of crushed intimacy along the dark twisting lanes. In the eery mottled light of a distant lamp, a shadow lies on his stomach on the grass-patched ground, another straddles him: ignoring the danger of detection in the last moments of exiled excitement. . . .



*In Central Park—as a rainstorm approached (the dark clouds crashing in the black sky which seemed to be lowering, ripped occasionally by the lightning)—once, one night in that park, aware of an unbearable exploding excitement within me mixed with unexplainable sudden panic, I stood against a tree and in frantic succession—and without even coming—I let seven night figures go down on me. And when, finally, the rain came pouring, I walked in it, soaked, as if the water would wash away whatever had caused the desperate night-experience.*

# JOAN NESTLE

*Writer, editor, and activist Joan Nestle cofounded the Lesbian Herstory Archives in 1974, a community-run archive and the “world’s largest collection of materials by and about lesbians and their communities.” In her poetic memoir, A Restricted Country, Nestle describes the daily lives and loves of lesbians in New York City in the 1960s.*

## From *A Restricted Country*

### LESBIAN MEMORIES 1: RIIS PARK, 1960

I may never change my name to nouns of sea or land or air, but I have loved this earth in all the ways she let me get close to her. Even the earth beneath the city streets sang to my legs as I strode around this city, watching the sun glint off windows, looking up at the West Side sky immense as it reached from the river to the hills of Central Park. Not a Kansas sky paralleled by a flat earth, but a sky forcing its blue between the water towers and the ornate peaks that try to catch it.

And then my deepest joy, when the hot weekends came, sometimes as early as May but surely by June. I would leave East Ninth street early on Saturday morning, wearing my bathing suit under my shorts, and head for the BMT, the start of a two-hour subway and bus trip that would take me to Riis Park—my Riviera, my Fire Island, my gay beach—where I could spread my blanket and watch strong butches challenge each other by weightlifting garbage cans, where I could see tattoos bulge with womanly effort and hear the shouts of the softball game come floating over the fence.

The subway wound its way through lower Manhattan, out to Brooklyn, and finally reached its last stop, Flatbush Avenue. I always had a book to read but would periodically cruise the car, becoming adept at picking out the gay passengers, the ones with longing faces turned toward the sun waiting for them at the end of the line. Sometimes I would find my Lesbian couple, older women, wide hipped, shoulders touching, sitting with their cooler filled with beer and cold chicken.

The last stop was a one-way, long station, but I could already smell the sea air. We crushed through the turnstiles, up onto Flatbush Avenue, which stretched like a royal highway to the temple of the sea. We would wait on line for the bus to pull in, a very gay line, and then as we moved down Flatbush, teenagers loud with their own lust poured into the bus. There were hostile encounters, the usual stares at the freaks, whispered taunts of *faggot*, *lezzie*, *is that a man or a woman*, but we did not care. We were heading to the sun, to our piece of the beach where we could kiss and hug and enjoy looking at each other.

The bus rolled down Flatbush, past low two-story family houses, neighborhoods with their beauty parlors and pizza joints. These were the only times that I, born in the Bronx, loved Brooklyn. I knew that at the end of that residential hegemony was the ocean I loved to dive into, that I watched turn purple in the late afternoon sun, that made me feel clean and young and strong, ready for a night of loving, my skin living with salt, clean enough for my lover's tongue, my body reaching to give to my lover's hands the fullness I had been given by the sea.

I would sit on the edge of my blanket, watching every touch, every flirtatious move around me, noting every curve of flesh, every erection, every nipple hard with irritation or desire. I drank in the spectacle of Lesbian and gay men's sensuality, always looking for the tall dark butch who would walk over and stand above me, her shadow breaking the sun, asking my name.

And the times I came with my lover, the wonder of kissing on the hot blanket in the sunlight, the joy of laying my head in her lap as we sat and watched the waves grow small in the dusk. The

wonderful joy of my lover's body stretched over me, rolling me into the sand, our wrestling, our laughter, chases leading into the cooling water. I would wrap my legs around her, and she would bounce me on the sea, or I would duck below the surface and suck her nipples, pulling them into the ocean.

Whenever I turned away from the ocean to face the low cement wall that ran along the back of our beach, I was forced to remember that we were always watched: by teenagers on bikes, pointing and laughing, and by more serious starers who used telescopes to focus in on us. But we were undaunted. Even the cops deciding to clean up the beach by arresting men whose suits were judged too minimal, hauling them over the sand into paddy wagons, did not destroy our sun.

Only once do I remember the potential power of our people becoming a visible thing, like a mighty arm threatening revenge if respect was not paid. A young man was brought ashore by the exhausted lifeguards and his lover fell to his knees, keening for his loss. A terrible quiet fell on our beach, and like the moon drawing the tides, we formed an ever-growing circle around the lovers, opening a path only wide enough for the police carrying the stretcher, our silence threatening our anger if this grief was not respected. The police, sinking into the sand under the heavy weight of their uniforms, looked around and stopped joking. Silently they placed the dead youth on the stretcher and started the long walk away from the ocean. His lover, supported by friends, followed behind, and then like a thick human rope, we all marched after them, our near-naked bodies shining with palm oil and sweat, men and women walking in a bursting silence behind the body, escorting it to the ambulance, past the staring interlopers. The freaks had turned into a people to whom respect must be paid.

Later in my life I learned the glories of Fire Island, the luxury of Cherry Grove. But this tired beach, filled with the children of the boroughs, was my first free place where I could face the ocean that claimed me as its daughter and kiss in blazing sunlight the salt-tinged lips of the woman I loved.

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## LESBIAN MEMORIES 2: THE LOWER EAST SIDE, 1966

*Rachel, Rachel  
whore, whore  
wore your hair down to the floor  
and we laid our hearts at your silken door*

We had all left something, all of us who careened down Second Avenue, pouring out of the side streets—East Sixth, East Ninth, East Twelfth—numbers and letters exact in their geographic depiction, their pureness of form covering the swelter of life that tumbled from apartment to apartment. Out we would pour on a hot June morning, running down the crumbling stairs of the old brownstones, leaving behind the three-room railroad flat with its tub in the kitchen and bathroom in the hall. Like much older and wiser exiles, we never opened our conversations with questions about our beginnings. Information about previous life just seemed to filter through or got filled in years later. We used our bodies, our actions, our costumes, the close proximity of our lives to tell our stories.

I don't know how I learned Rachel was a whore before I met her, but I did. Perhaps Meryl, who ran the head shop on Tenth Street, told me. Rachel of the Lower East Side and all points east. Flowing red hair down her back, like a slow-moving river, tall, thin Rachel who believed in the gospel of Tim O'Leary and earned her money turning tricks. Her one-room apartment was different from the ones I knew: hers had been redone into something called a studio. One square room filled with Rachel's bed, big enough for any position, covered with a zebra-print artificial fur and crowned with black satin pillows. Her kitchen was a countertop covered by the smallest appliances I had ever seen, an apartment kept up for her by her gangster boyfriend, who was later found shot in the mouth,



sprawled out in his car under a Lower East Side bridge—another piece of information that floated down and settled in my mind as the years went by. Just the same way I heard a year later that Rachel was now walking the streets of Indian cities looking for her guru, her red hair and tall slimness suspended in the hot morning air. Always by a river. For Rachel, all rivers were one: the East River floating its length into the Ganges, the Ganges reaching under the earth for the Amazon, the Amazon stretching its sinewy hand to the Nile, and the Nile starting slowly and then rushing to the Yangtze. Walking alongside them all would be Rachel, bringing the water home in her body's touches. Rachel was a giver of dreams who lived in her own, dreams outlined in the hard need for money. For pleasure, she frequented our Lesbian bars, and when we were lucky, she took us home to roll in the length of her red hair.

One day, before our night of lovemaking, I saw her coming down the broad expanse of Second Avenue—the avenue that held all the wonders of the world, that sparkled like the Champs-Élysées, which I had never seen, on its good days and which breathed sad histories on its bad ones. She was a languid yet forceful figure, ever moving forward while parts of her trailed behind. She came closer and closer, laughter building up in her eyes. She wore, as always, a garment of her own creation, a white cotton sari that floated free behind her. The sun glinted off her colors, the red and white of her dreams. Rachel, the lewd queen of psychedelic hookers, and I, bound to the earth, a broad-hipped woman who couldn't hold a candle to this red-haired woman's loveliness, I watched her come to me as all the life of the wide street eddied around us. She stopped still in front of me, but her hair kept moving, and the air danced around her. She smiled, laughed, and pulled me to her, kissing me deeply, opening my lips for her tongue, entering and opening me right there in the street, with the Ratner regulars staring at us. Then, giving me a big wink, she picked up her stride once again and continued down the street.

This was the Lower East Side, a place where gifts were laid at your feet, given by those who seemed to have nothing, yet carrying in their eyes and on their hands a broken radiance.

## DEL MARTIN AND PHYLLIS LYON

*Lifetime activists and partners Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon cofounded the pioneering lesbian organization the Daughters of Bilitis in 1955, the first of its kind in the United States. This selection is from their 1972 book, Lesbian/Woman, in which they recount the early years of the organization and the founding of their magazine, The Ladder.*

### From “Lesbians United”

Daughters of Bilitis began with eight women: four Lesbian couples—four blue-collar and four white-collar workers, among whom were one Filipina and one Chicana.

The idea originated with Marie, a short brown-skinned woman who had come from the Philippine Islands. In contrast to the United States, the Philippines have no public sanctions or discrimination against homosexuals, and Marie envisioned a club for Lesbians here in the States that would give them an opportunity to meet and socialize outside of the gay bars. She also felt that women needed privacy—privacy not only from the watchful eye of the police, but from gaping tourists in the bars and from inquisitive parents and families.

So in our eagerness to meet other Lesbians, we found ourselves on the evening of September 21, 1955, laying plans for a secret Lesbian club. For four consecutive weeks we met to draw up a constitution and bylaws. At the fourth meeting there still remained the question of a name for the fledgling organization.

“How about Daughters of Bilitis?” Nancy suggested.

The rest of us looked at her blankly.

“I ran across this book by Pierre Louÿs that has in it this long poem called ‘Songs of Bilitis.’” Nancy held up the volume she’d been

holding on her lap. “It’s really quite beautiful love poetry, but what’s even more interesting, Bilitis is supposed to have lived on Lesbos at the time of Sappho.”

“We thought that ‘Daughters of Bilitis’ would sound like any other women’s lodge—you know, like the Daughters of the Nile or the DAR,” Priscilla added. “‘Bilitis’ would mean something to us, but not to any outsider. If anyone asked us, we could always say we belong to a poetry club.”

And so Daughters of Bilitis (or DOB as it is popularly known) came into being. Officers were elected, and Del became the first president. In her acceptance speech she noted that it was time to launch a membership campaign and asked everyone to bring prospective members to the next meeting.

The first official meeting of the Daughters of Bilitis was held October 19, 1955, in a small apartment off Fillmore Street in San Francisco’s Western Addition, where Nancy and Priscilla lived. At the appointed time, four very masculine-appearing types arrived to look us over. They strode in, muttered their names, plunked themselves down in chairs, and just stared at us. They were wary and diffident. But they were also defiantly and intimidatingly expectant, as if lying in wait for us to tell them about our dumb idea so they could clobber it.

Since Nancy had invited them (she’d met one in the factory where she worked and two in a bar), we had expected her to break the ice so that we might be on a better social footing before starting the meeting. But she and Priscilla had vanished, gone off to the kitchen to make coffee. One by one the other four DOB members also disappeared. (We never knew we had such a large coffee committee!) And there we sat, the two of us, green and inexperienced in the gay life, left to cope on our own with four hostile strangers.

We made a few stabs at friendly conversation that brought a few grunts and one-word responses. Finally the one wearing a man’s suit, who seemed to be the spokesman for our visitors, asked impatiently, “When are you going to start the meeting? We don’t have all night!”

So Del took a deep breath and plunged in, explaining that DOB was to be a Lesbian social club with parties and discussion groups to be held in private homes for the time being. Phyllis added that everything would be done to protect the anonymity of the members so that they would have nothing to fear.

“Daughters of Bilitis—how did you ever happen to pick that name?”

Del’s explanation was followed by a hoot. “I wouldn’t want to carry a DOB membership card in my wallet! What if someone saw it? It’s too obvious.”

This remark completely astounded us. The speaker, dressed as she was in men’s clothes right down to the shoes on her feet, was to us a walking advertisement. She couldn’t have been more obvious if she was wearing a sign on her back.

In the beginning we held three functions a month: a business meeting, a social, and a discussion session. Since we were all heavy coffee drinkers, these came to be known as Gab ’n Javas. During these meetings we discussed all the problems we faced as Lesbians, how we had managed them in our personal lives, and how we could deal with the public both individually and as a group.

At one such gathering held in our home, we made the mistake of inviting one of our straight friends. Rae, we thought, had gotten along well with the group. But Marie called us on it later: “DOB is a club for Lesbians. That means *no straight people* allowed.”

“At the last meeting we’d been discussing the problem of being accepted by heterosexuals,” Phyllis argued, “and one way is to meet them and talk to them.”

“The last party was over at your sister’s, and she isn’t gay,” Del added. The others nodded. But to Marie that was quite different.

“Besides, I thought you liked Rae,” Phyllis said.

“I do. I think she’s really a very nice person. And I’m sorry—but she doesn’t belong around DOB!” Marie held stubbornly. “DOB is just for Lesbians and no one else.”

That marked the beginning of a long series of arguments about rules and regulations, about the degree of secrecy we had to maintain, about mode of dress and behavior, about dealing with

straights as well as gay men, about the possibility of publishing pamphlets explaining our cause. The arguments eventually led to an ultimate rift.

Marie and her friend pulled out first, and later Nancy and Priscilla left too. The group had grown to twelve by then, but a couple of new additions dropped out too. If DOB was only going to be a series of hassles, they didn't want to be any part of it. That left six of us. We sat down and talked over the state of DOB's affairs. We decided it was a good idea, one worth pursuing, even if the odds were against us. So we started out all over again with barely enough members to fill all the slots of the elected officers. By that time our acquaintances in the Lesbian world of San Francisco had broadened, and we were certain we could find more who could see the value of DOB.

Only recently have we realized that the DOB split was along worker/middle class lines. The blue-collar workers who left DOB wanted a supersecret, exclusively Lesbian social club. The white-collar workers, however, had broadened their vision of the scope of the organization. They had discovered the Mattachine Society and were interacting with the men who had already launched what was to become known as the homophile movement. Through Mattachine we heard of ONE, Inc. in Los Angeles and had attended their 1956 Mid-Winter Institute. There we were welcomed warmly by Ann Carll Reid, then editor of *ONE* magazine. "We're so glad to see women organizing! We need you, and we'll do anything we can to help. We'll advertise DOB in the magazine. Also, you can write up a blurb on DOB for inclusion in the book we're publishing, *Homosexuals Today*."

We felt DOB could meet both needs. Those members who were interested only in the social affairs were free to limit their participation. Parties, picnics, and chili feeds could serve as fundraisers for the work to be done by those interested in publishing a newsletter and setting up public forums. But these latter proposals scared off our friends. They didn't want their names on a mailing list, and they most certainly didn't want to mix with "outsiders" (which included gay men as well as heterosexual men and women).

Nancy went on to found two more secret Lesbian social clubs. The first was Quatrefoil, a group comprised largely of working-class mothers and their partners, with a sprinkling of singles. Nancy ruled the group with an iron hand, enforcing all the rules that we in DOB had balked at. When Barb successfully challenged her leadership, she went on to establish Hale Aikane, which had all the pomp, circumstance, and ritual of a secret sorority. Both groups (now defunct) lasted for some time. Quatrefoil ventured out a few times to meet with representatives of other San Francisco homophile organizations, and Hale Aikane surfaced when they found an old store building, which they had converted to club rooms. They sought DOB's financial help, and the two shared the facility for a short while, until Hale Aikane went out of business altogether.

So desperate were we for members in the early days of DOB that we coddled, nursed and practically hand-fed every woman who expressed the least interest. We had them over for dinner, offered them rides to and from the meetings—some even moved in on us for days and weeks at a time. Very often our taxi service meant rushing home from work and bolting down a quick dinner so as to leave an hour or so in advance to pick up all our passengers. If there were the slightest evidence that a member or prospect was disgruntled about anything at all (even the weather), there we were, ready to explain, mediate and smooth over hurt feelings, and clear up misunderstandings. But this pampering was taking up far too much of our time. Besides, we decided, the organization would have to stand on its own merits or it wasn't worth worrying about.

By the end of its first year DOB had fifteen members, only three of the original eight remaining. We decided to make an all-out push. We started publishing *The Ladder* with Phyllis as editor, and we set up monthly public discussion meetings in a downtown hall. The Mattachine Society was renting several offices on Mission Street, and they sublet half of one tiny room to DOB. A member donated a desk. We bought a used typewriter and filing cabinet. Several San Francisco businesses "donated" small items like paper clips, staples, and typing paper. We were in business.

Volume One, Number One of *The Ladder*, a twelve-page mimeographed newsletter in magazine format, made its debut during October of 1956. We were aiming for about 250 copies, but Mattachine's tired old mimeograph only coughed out about 170 that were halfway legible. The cover design, drawn by staff artist B.O.B., showed a line of women approaching a very tall ladder which protruded from the shore of the bay and reached up into lofty, cloudy skies. It carried the legend, "from the city of many moods—San Francisco, California." In the right-hand corner was the DOB emblem, a triangle with a *d* and a *b*. Underneath was inscribed the DOB motto, "Qui vive."

The purpose of the Daughters of Bilitis, a women's organization to aid the Lesbian in discovering her potential and her place in society, was spelled out. The organization was to encourage and support the Lesbian in her search for her personal, interpersonal, social, economic, and vocational identity. The DOB social functions would enable the Lesbian to find and communicate with others like herself, thereby expanding her social world outside the bars. She could find in the discussion groups opportunity for the interchange of ideas, a chance to talk openly about the problems she faced as a Lesbian in her everyday life. Also available to her would be DOB's library on themes of homosexuality and of women in general. In educating the public to accept the Lesbian as an individual and eliminate the prejudice which places oppressive limitations on her lifestyle, the group proposed an outreach program: to sponsor public forums, to provide speakers for other interested civic groups, and to publish and disseminate educational and rational literature on the Lesbian. DOB also announced its willingness to participate in responsible research projects and its interest in promoting changes in the legal system to insure the rights of all homosexuals.

For today's "liberationists" the original wording of DOB's lofty aims contained many loaded words and concepts, which were to come under fire time and again over the years. Terms like "integration into" and "adjustment to" society, for instance, are no longer viable. Homosexuals today are not seeking tolerance; they are demanding total acceptance. But one must consider the times in

which DOB came into being. Just the month prior to the first publication, police had raided the Alamo Club, popularly known as Kelly's, loading thirty-six patrons into their paddy wagons. DOB was also born on the heels of the United States State Department scandals of the early fifties when hundreds of homosexual men and women had been summarily fired from their jobs with the federal government when their identity had been disclosed or even hinted at. Most Lesbians were completely downtrodden, having been brainwashed by a powerful heterosexual church and by the much-touted precepts of psychoanalysis. There was not the sense of community or solidarity that exists today. Lesbians were isolated and separated—and scared.

The first issue of *The Ladder* contained a "President's Message" from Del challenging the women who received it (everybody we knew or had heard of, friends of friends of friends) to join us in the effort to bring understanding to and about the homosexual minority by adding the feminine voice and viewpoint to a mutual problem already being dealt with by the men of Mattachine and ONE.

"If lethargy is supplanted by an energized constructive program, if cowardice gives way to the solidarity of a cooperative front, if the 'let Georgia do it' attitude is replaced by the realization of individual responsibility in thwarting the evils of ignorance, superstition, prejudice and bigotry," then Del argued, the lot of the Lesbian could indeed be changed.

We learned later that DOB's was not really the first Lesbian publication in the United States. *Vice Versa*, "America's Gayest Magazine," which was "dedicated in all seriousness to those of us who will never quite be able to adapt ourselves to the iron-bound rules of convention," was published and distributed privately in Los Angeles from June 1947 through February 1948. The work of editing, production (typewritten—but with columns justified!), and distribution was all done by one woman, Lisa Ben, who had previously achieved some note in the science fiction field under her real name. Each copy carried short stories, poetry, news commentary, bibliography, letters, and reviews of pertinent plays, films, or books. Further, *ONE* had put out a special "Feminine



Viewpoint” issue (February 1954), which was written, compiled, and edited entirely by women. It was one of the few issues of *ONE* that had completely sold out, and there was still demand for reprints.

The response to the first issue of *The Ladder* was equally enthusiastic. We had acquired a post office box, but we were in no way prepared for the volume of mail we received. As volunteers working for DOB after our regular jobs, and small in membership, we were hard put to read it all—let alone answer it!

However, the “President’s Message” in the second issue, this time by Del’s successor D. Griffin, noted with dismay how many of the letters had expressed fear of being on “the mailing list of an organization *like this*.” An editorial entitled “Your Name Is Safe!” cited the 1953 decision of the United State Supreme Court (*U.S. v. Rumely*) upholding the right of the publisher to refuse to reveal the names of purchasers of reading material to a congressional investigating committee.

Plagued with fear of identification and fear of being on mailing or membership lists, DOB has been consistently hampered in its growth as an organization and in its outreach into the public sphere. When the organization was founded in 1955, allegiance to such a homophile group was indeed a scary proposition. In the beginning members took pseudonyms or were known to their fellow members simply by their first names.

When Phyllis assumed the editorship of *The Ladder* she also assumed the alias of “Ann Ferguson.” About the same time we started the public lecture series, at which meetings we, of course, publicized the magazine. When someone requested an introduction to the editor, members found themselves calling, “Ann . . . Ann! . . . Ann! . . . ANN!” But it finally took “Phyllis!” to get her attention. From that point on we cautioned those who intended to use aliases to at least keep their first names or nicknames.

By the fourth issue *The Ladder* carried an obituary—complete with heavy black border. Ann Ferguson had died. “I confess. I killed Ann Ferguson—with premeditation and malice aforethought. Ann Ferguson wrote that article, ‘Your Name Is Safe!’ Her words were true, her conclusions logical and documented—yet she was not

practicing what she preached. . . . At the December public discussion meeting of the Daughters of Bilitis we got up—Ann Ferguson and I—and did away with Ann. Now there is only Phyllis Lyon.”

Before we could get out the third edition of the magazine, which was to inform our Lesbian readers what to do in case of arrest, the Mattachine mimeograph petered out entirely. Macy’s sign shop came to the rescue. There were several gay women working there on the offset press. We typed *The Ladder* on paper (printing) plates, and they ran them off. Suddenly toward the end of the month there was a flurry of activity in this Macy’s department.

On one particular day, when *The Ladder* was on the press, the boss came into the shop. One worker rushed toward him with a very loud, enthusiastic “Good morning, *Mr. Holt!*” detaining him at the door. Another stepped in front of the stack of pages which had already been run off, blocking them from his view. The foreman, who had been feeding the press, looked frantically for a replacement. She didn’t dare ask either of her helpers to move, so she shouted above the whirr of the press, “I’ll be through with this job in just a few minutes.” Holt waved. “That’s all right. You’re busy. I’ll come back later.”

This call was too close for comfort. By that time we had become somewhat more solvent. We had received some publicity in the *Independent*, a monthly newspaper in New York. Our notoriety had spread. Letters, memberships, and donations were beginning to pour in. Pan-Graphic Press, a Mattachine-connected print shop, offered to do the work for a nominal fee. But we still had to type the stencils and had the same tedious work of collating, folding, and stapling by hand to do when the pages dried.

Meanwhile the public discussion meetings were going very well. The “public,” of course, was composed chiefly of homosexuals and primarily those of the female gender. The series of lectures by attorneys, psychologists, psychiatrists, employment and marriage counselors was planned to dispel some of the fears and anxieties of the Lesbian. We reasoned that at a “public” meeting you could hear about “those” people and not necessarily be so identified simply by being in the audience.

For those who doubted its legality or permanency, the Daughters of Bilitis became a full-fledged nonprofit corporation under the laws of the State of California in January 1957, on acceptance by the Secretary of State of the articles of incorporation, filed by attorney Kenneth C. Zwerin on our behalf. Later Mr. Zwerin was also to obtain for DOB its tax-exempt status with the federal government.

During that same month of January, sixteen women attended a get-acquainted DOB brunch in the English Room of the New Clark Hotel in Los Angeles in an effort to organize a second chapter. The meeting was held in conjunction with ONE's annual Mid-Winter Institute. It was not until 1958, after several false starts, that the Los Angeles chapter took hold under Val Vanderwood's leadership. Also in 1958, when we attended the Mattachine Society's convention in New York City, two more chapters came into being—New York, headed by Barbara Gittings, who was later to become an editor of *The Ladder*; and Rhode Island, led by Frances LaSalle. Since then, chapters of DOB have appeared, been active, lain dormant, revived, or dissolved in such cities as Chicago, Boston, New Orleans, Reno, Nevada; Portland, San Diego, Cleveland, Denver, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Melbourne, Australia.

# FRANKLIN KAMENY

*Frank Kameny devoted his life to activism after being dismissed from a government position as an astronomer in 1958 because of his homosexuality. A key member of the Washington, D.C., Mattachine Society, Kameny was instrumental in the pickets of the White House and the Pentagon in the 1960s, and was the first openly gay candidate for the US Congress, in 1971. Selected here are his letters to presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson demanding civil rights for homosexuals.*

## From *Gay Is Good*

### KAMENY TO PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY

*May 15, 1961*

Dear President Kennedy:

I write to you for two reasons: (1) To ask that you act as a “court of last appeal” in a matter in which I believe that you can properly act as such; and (2) perhaps much more important, to bring to your attention, and to ask for your constructive action on, a situation involving at least 15,000,000 Americans, and in which a “New Frontier” approach is very badly needed. These people are the nation’s homosexuals—a minority group in no way different, as such, from the Negroes, the Jews, the Catholics, and other minority groups. . . .

In World War II, I willingly fought the Germans, with bullets, in order to preserve and secure my rights, freedoms, and liberties, and those of my fellow citizens. In 1961, it has, ironically, become necessary for me to fight my own government, with words, in order

to achieve some of the very same rights, freedoms, and liberties for which I placed my life in jeopardy in 1945. This letter is part of that fight.

The homosexual in the United States today is in much the same position as was the Negro about 1925. The difference is that the Negro, in his dealings with this government, and in his fight for his proper rights, liberties, and freedoms, has met, at worst, merely indifference to him and his problems, and, at best, active assistance; the homosexual has met only active hostility from his government.

The homosexuals in this country are increasingly less willing to tolerate the abuse, repression, and discrimination directed at them, both officially and unofficially, and they are beginning to stand up for their rights and freedoms as citizens no less deserving than other citizens of those rights and freedoms. They are no longer willing to accept their present status as second-class citizens and as second-class human beings; they are neither.

Statistics on the sharply rising numbers of homosexuals who are fighting police and legal abuses, less-than-fully-honorable discharges from the military, security-system disqualifications, and who are taking perfectly proper and legal advantage of military policies and prejudices and draftboard questions to escape the draft, etc., will, I believe, bear me out.

The winds of change are blowing. A wise and foresighted government will start NOW to take *constructive* action on this question.

Your administration has taken a firm and admirable stand, and has taken an active interest in the maintenance of the civil liberties of minority groups, and in the elimination of discrimination against them. Yet the federal government is the prime offender in depriving the homosexual of his civil and other liberties, and in actively discriminating against him. May I suggest that the homosexual is as deserving of his government's protection and assistance in these areas as is the Negro, and needs that protection at least as much—actually much more? The abuses, by constituted authority, of the person, property, and liberties of American homosexuals are flagrant, shocking, and appalling, and yet not only is not a finger

raised by the government to assist these people, but the government acts in active, virulent conspiracy to foster and perpetuate these abuses.

This is an area in which a sophisticated, rational, and above all, a civilized approach is badly needed. Short of a policy of outright extermination (and, economically, personally, and professionally, the government's actions are often tantamount to this), the government's practices and policies could not be further removed from such a sane approach. We are badly in need of a breath of fresh air here, Mr. Kennedy—a reconsideration of the matter, divorced from the old, outworn clichés, discredited assumptions, fallacious and specious reasoning, and idle superstition. The traditional new broom, with its clean sweep, is badly needed.

Under present policies, upon no discernible rational ground, the government is deprived of the services of large numbers of competent, capable citizens—often skilled, highly trained, and talented—and others are forced to contribute to society at far less than their full capacity, simply because in their personal, out-of-working-hours lives they do not conform to narrow, archaic, puritan prejudice and taboo.

In my own case, extensive technical training—a Harvard Ph.D. in Astronomy—is going completely to waste, entirely as a result of the government's practices and policies on this question. While the nation cries out for technically trained people, I, two years ago, as a result of the government's acts and policies, was barely surviving on twenty cents' worth of food per day. Is this reasonable?

You have said: "Ask not what can your country do for you, but what can you do for your country." I know what I can best do for my country, but my country's government, for no sane reason, will not let me do it. I wish to be of service to my country and to my government; I am capable of being of such service; I need only to be allowed to be so. Thus far, my government has stubbornly and irrationally refused to allow me to be so, and has done its best to make it impossible for me ever to be so. This is equally true, actually or potentially, of millions of homosexuals in this country—well over 10% of our adult population. Not only the society in which

they live, but the government under which they live, have steadfastly and stubbornly refused to allow them to serve and to contribute. . . .

Action by the government, on this question, is needed in four specific areas (listed here in no particular order) and a fifth general one. These are: (1) the law, and the mode and practices of its administration and enforcement, and the abuses thereof; (2) federal employment policies; (3) the policies, practices, and official attitudes of the military; (4) security-clearance policies and practices in government employment, in the military, and in private industry under government contract; and (5) the education of the public and the changing of their primitive attitudes. No constructive action has ever been taken in any of these areas.

Yours is an administration which has openly disavowed blind conformity. Here is an unconventional group with the courage to be so. Give them the support they deserve as citizens seeking the pursuit of happiness guaranteed them by the Declaration of Independence.

You yourself said, in your recent address at George Washington University, "that (people) desire to develop their own personalities and their own potentials, that democracy permits them to do so." But your government, by its policies certainly does not permit the homosexual to develop his personality and his potential. I do not feel that it is expecting too much to ask that governmental practice be in accord with administration verbiage.

At present, prominently displayed at the entrance to each of the Civil Service Commission's buildings is an excerpt from another statement of yours, in which you said, "let it be clear that this Administration recognizes the value of daring and dissent." I have demonstrated that I have the daring to register public and official dissent in an area wherein those directly involved have never before dared register with dissent. May I ask that my government show equal daring and dissent in "coming to grips" with this question in a proper and constructive fashion. Let more than mere lip service be given to laudable-sounding ideals!

I can close in no better fashion than by quoting Thomas Jefferson:

I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions. But laws and constitutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered, and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors.

His words could not be more aptly quoted in this regard. Let us, as we advance into the Space Age, discard the policies and attitudes, and “laws and constitutions,” the customs and institutions of the Stone Age. . . .

Thank you for your consideration of the matters presented here. I look forward to your reply.

Most sincerely yours,

Franklin E. Kameny

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## KAMENY TO PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON

*October 23, 1965*

Dear Mr. President:

A group of homosexual American citizens, and those supporting their cause, is picketing the White House, today, in lawful, dignified, and orderly protest—in the best American tradition—against the treatment being meted out to fifteen million homosexual American citizens by their government—treatment which consistently makes of them second-class citizens, at best.

Our grievances fall into two classes: Specific and General.

I. Specific:

a. *Exclusion from Federal Employment . . .*



- b. *Discriminatory, Exclusionary, and Harshly Punitive Treatment by the Armed Services . . .*
- c. *Denial of Security Clearances to Homosexuals as a Group or Class*

II. *General:*

- a. There can be no justification for the continuing refusal, through two administrations, and for more than three years, of our presidents and their staffs—as well as many government agencies and departments—to accord to spokesmen for the homosexual community even the common courtesy and decency of acknowledgments—much less meaningful responses—to serious and proper letters written to them in search of their assistance in the solution of serious problems affecting large numbers of citizens.
- b. Equally, there can be no justification for the continuing refusal of most agencies and departments of our government—including the staff of the White House—to meet with representatives of the homosexual community (our nation's largest minority after the Negro) constructively to discuss solutions to the problems besetting them—problems in significant measure created by and reinforced by our government and by its attitudes, policies, and practices.
- c. We find offensive the continuing attitude of hostility, enmity, and animosity—amounting to a state of war—directed by our government toward its homosexual citizens. No group of *our* citizenry should have to tolerate an attitude of this sort upon the part of their government.

Our government chooses to note that homosexual American citizens are homosexuals, but conveniently chooses to disregard that they are also Americans and citizens.

In short, Mr. President, the homosexual citizens of America are being treated as second-class citizens—in a country which claims that it has no second-class citizens. The advantages claimed by our country for all of its citizens—equality, opportunity, fair treatment—

are not only denied to our homosexual citizens by society at large, they are denied at the active instigation and with the active cooperation of our government. This is not as it should be.

The right of its citizens to be different and not to conform, without being placed thereby in a status of inferiority or disadvantage, has always been the glory of our country. This right should apply to the homosexual American citizen as well. At present it does not.

You have proposed, and are indeed working vigorously and successfully toward what you have felicitously termed “The Great Society.” Mr. President—NO society can be truly great which excludes from full participation and contribution, or relegates to a secondary role, ANY minority of its citizenry. The homosexual citizen, totally without cause, is presently systematically excluded from your Great Society.

We ask, Mr. President, for what all American citizens—singly and collectively—have a right to ask: That our problems be given the fair, unbiased consideration by our government due the problems of all the citizenry—consideration in which we, ourselves, are allowed to participate actively and are invited to do so, as citizens in our country have a right to expect to do.

We ask for a reconsideration of ancient, outmoded approaches to, and policies toward homosexuals and homosexuality—approaches and policies which are unseemly for a country claiming to support the principles and the way of life for which our country stands—approaches and policies which should long ago have been discarded. We ask that on these questions, our President and his government accept and shoulder actively the role properly attributed to them by The Report of the President’s Commission on National Goals (1960): “One role of government is to stimulate changes of attitude.”

Sincerely yours,

Franklin E. Kameny

# VIRGINIA PRINCE

*Virginia Prince was a pioneering transgender activist who published the magazine Transvestia. In this essay for the magazine, she recounts her personal journey with her gender identity and how it affected her intimate relationships.*

## “The How and Why of Virginia”

I am Virginia, but I was not so always. I used to be Muriel, but I was not that always either. Before that I was, you guessed it, a boy. Today I am 49 years old, 5’8” tall, weigh about 155 lbs. have brown eyes and greying hair, wear a size 18 dress and an 8B shoe, but these are the vital statistics today, let’s go back and start at the beginning, where all good autobiographies should start.

To begin with, may I say that I suffered none of the experiences that psychiatry feels cause TVism. My parents are still together today, they didn’t drink or fight, I was never punished by being made to wear dresses, nor did they want a girl (I’ve checked this with them). I was always a boy. When I was 4 a sister arrived and that was all. The beginnings of my interest in attire are shrouded in mystery. My first interest was in high-heeled shoes. The only reason I can think for this interest was that my mother never wore them. She was not dowdy, but she did not dress as fussily feminine as many women and she was proud of her feet and was not about to “deform” them with such monstrosities as high heels. By comparison, a boyhood chum of mine who lived across the street, had a mother who was always dressed in the height of fashion and with heels, of course. She appeared to present a better picture of feminine motherhood to me. Anyway, if we ever had lady guests in

the house who wore heels I would be sure to visit her room on an “inspection” tour. I also began at this time to cut out pictures of high-heeled shoes from magazines and newspapers and made a scrapbook of them. Since some nice pictures of shoes also involved lingerie shots, I began to cut out these too. Although I cannot date the beginnings, it must have been around 12 that I took to visiting my mother’s bureau in her absence and dressing in her lingerie. Of course, like everyone else who did this, I was most careful to put things back just as they were found.

The first specific date that I have been able to remember was when I was 16 and we went to Europe. The last night on the ship was the Captain’s dinner, which was followed by a masquerade. A lady friend of my parents wanted to dress me as a girl, which I indignantly refused, while all the time I would have loved nothing more. Since I remember this so clearly at the age of 16, it is evident that activities of a TV nature must have been going on for the preceding 2 or 3 years. Anyway, as I got older I got bolder, went down to the poorer part of town, and bought things of my own, including shoes with heels. I can still feel the combined embarrassment and thrill when I went into a shoe store the first time to “buy a pair for my ‘sister,’ who had been bedridden and was now getting about and needed some new shoes.” How fortunate it was that “her” feet were exactly the same size as mine. I nearly blew apart during the sale, but I remember the thrill of knowing that I had my very own first pair of high heels under my arm as I left the store.

I progressed to dressing completely. If my parents were to be gone long I’d walk around the block. Later I would get on a streetcar and ride a couple of miles, get off, and return the same way. I well remember one Sunday afternoon when I got attired in a dark green velvet skirt and light green silk blouse of mother’s, plus a sheer garden party type of hat with a wide brim and appliquéd flowers. Thus dressed, I ventured out of the house in the afternoon sun and walked a few blocks to a main street and along it for several blocks and then home. *Joy of joys and thrill of thrills. I was a LADY on a Sunday afternoon stroll* and the whole world saw me and knew I

was a lady. Any TV will know what I mean. As I grew older I bought more of my own things, began to go to cafeterias for meals and to shows at night and generally to do more venturesome things.

All during college and postgraduate days I had some feminine things with me, and on vacations home I continued my excursions downtown when things were clear. I was never caught by my parents or anyone else. After getting out of college I became active in a young people's church group, and whenever they would have a Halloween or New Year's Eve party, I would turn up in some sort of feminine getup, so I became rather known for this sort of thing.

Inevitably I fell in love and eventually married. The day before the event I burned or disposed of all my clothes under the happy misapprehension that marriage would end all this silly stuff. I had imagined that being rather shy with the girls I had created a "girl" for myself using my own body and therefore, since I was now going to have a real girl all my own, I would have no need of such artificiality. Many of those who will read this will recognize the feeling and also the error of it. No, marriage didn't cure me—it slowed me down for a while, but whenever my wife was away I was right back into it again. Finally, one Halloween about 3 years after we were married and had moved back to the same town where we had been active in the church, things just got too much. I had decided to go to the party with a "half man half woman" costume. By turning one pant leg and one shirt and coat sleeve into the other a half suit could be made. This meant putting on the dress first and then the coat and pants on one side and pinning the outfit together. Of course, it required a dress rehearsal the night before the party. When I had finished proving that the costume would work, I just stayed in the dress and heels and came out and lay down on the sofa to read. My wife nagged me about 6 times to "get up and take those clothes off." I hadn't had an opportunity for a long time and I wasn't about to get out of them. However, her nagging finally got to me and I sat up and said, "I'm not going to take them off; I enjoy wearing them." Her look was incredulous and I told her I wouldn't bother to explain things that night but I would after the party, and I did—giving her the whole bit.

This resulted in my being permitted to wear things around the house every couple of weeks. On these occasions she would go to bed. Being left alone was almost worse than being denied the opportunity because it made one feel despicable and unfit for company. However, this went on for several years.

One day I had the shock of my life, and a turning point was reached. I had gone to another city about 400 miles away. There I paid a visit to an older TV whom I had known, and met his understanding girlfriend. The TV had to go to a meeting this night and suggested that Muriel (the name I used in those days) and his girlfriend should go window shopping downtown, which we did. We talked and talked girl talk, went into one of the hotels and had a drink, rebuffed a couple of friendly marines, and eventually went home. When I got back to the hotel and began to undress I also began to cry. I went to bed and cried. Cried like my heart would break and did so in fits and starts all night. The odd thing about it was that I didn't really know what I was crying about.

I completed my work in this city and took the train home. Both the work and the ride home were difficult because every time I would have a moment to myself without either talking to someone or reading, my eyes would fill with tears. I have never been so completely miserable in my life before or since. It took me about 4 days to get over the jag, and all the time I was thinking and analyzing my feelings to see what brought this depression on. Finally, after several days, it came to me. For the first time in my life (I was about 33 then), I had been treated by another human as a girl, without pretense or strain. This woman and I had had a woman's evening together. This had proved such a terrific contrast to all my previous life that it just broke the barriers that night in the hotel.

My growth started from that experience. The first thing that became evident to me was that I had been blackmailing MYSELF through fear of discovery. I asked myself who in the world did I least want to know about my TVism and the answer was my father. I therefore determined to tell him and thereby break the blackmail. I did. I met him as Muriel and told him all about it. It was tough on

him and tougher on me, but it helped because I had killed this fear and I no longer had to worry about it.

Several years later I was divorced. My wife had gone on a trip and while away had consulted a psychiatrist, who, on the basis of what she alone had said to him, told her that I was undoubtedly a homosexual and that she should get a divorce. This was hard to take, 1) I didn't want the divorce, 2) I was not a homosexual, 3) she took my son, house, and everything else, and 4) she was unwilling to even try to work things out with professional help. So my life was wrecked, but that didn't stop her. About 2 years later she went to court to try to deny me any visitation or weekend custody rights with my son. The grounds were, of course, that I was an unfit father and should not be allowed to have my own son with me unchaperoned. Of course, the whole TV bit came out in the papers—picture and all, but the judge was one of the few wise ones and ruled in my favor. I was permitted to continue to have weekend custody. This too was a horrible experience, but I grew because of it. Again public exposure was the thing that I had feared the most, but it had brought upon me, so I could now afford the luxury of not worrying about it anymore. It had been done.

I forced myself to do another difficult task at this point. I was going with my present wife at the time; in fact she stood with me all during this trial. But the day after it we went back to the weekly dance at the church where I had appeared so many times at parties. Many of my friends had read the papers and seen my picture, but I appeared anyway and brazened it out. This too gave me strength. You know, they temper metal by fire and cold water. Intense fear, emotion, and release tempers people too.

Well, to cut a long story short, I married my present wife with her having full knowledge about the whole TV bit. She had not always understood; in the early days before our marriage we talked a lot about the subject. Although she went along with me, she didn't really understand. Then one morning about 4 A.M. I was awakened by a phone call. It was she and the first thing she said was, "I understand!" Being half asleep I neither knew or much cared what it was she understood, but she had lain awake for a long time and

suddenly a light had burst on her and she knew that this TV-feminine expression was as much a part of me as brown eyes—that it was an inherent part of my personality. She has staunchly maintained that position ever since.

She didn't like the name Muriel, though, so Virginia has been my name ever since. She has helped make a lady out of me and I'm grateful. We have gone on trips together as two women and to many shows, dinners, and shopping trips. Our marriage is a very happy one since it is based on a complete understanding. I have a rather large feminine wardrobe, which is kept in a special room designed for the purpose when we built our house. I dress exactly as I like on weekends and in evenings. Because of such complete acceptance I have been able to grow out of the "I must wear a dress and heels or nothing" stage. I have several pairs of capris, girl's slacks, suits, etc., which I wear together with flats and slippers—running about with or without wig, makeup, jewelry, etc. as fits my mood. I find that now that I can be accepted by her I have also learned to completely accept myself and as a girl I'm interested in feminine relaxation and comfort as she is.

Three years ago, I started to publish TRANSVESTIA because in thinking back over my life I saw all the pain and heartache I'd been through and how much of it could have been avoided if I'd known myself better and if my first wife and parents had known more about the TV matter too. Thus I decided that the very tempering experiences that hurt me so much had given me the growth, the freedom, and the guts, if you will, to start doing something about it for others, in the hope that they might be spared some of what I had been through.

So it is one of the biggest satisfactions of my life when I get letters from many of you indicating that my own heartaches, which led imperceptibly toward my present activities, have not been in vain. Your letters of appreciation tell me so every day.

Yours,

VIRGINIA



## SAMUEL R. DELANY

*Writer and critic Samuel R. Delany has transformed the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and memoir. In this section from his autobiography, *The Motion of Light in Water*, he wrestles with his identity as a black gay man in the 1950s and '60s and his struggles to come out to his fellow patients in a mental hospital, which he had voluntarily entered while on the verge of a breakdown.*

### From *The Motion of Light in Water*

The organist who played for the services at most of my father's funerals when I was a child was a brown, round, irrepressibly effeminate man named Herman. It was an open secret that Herman was queer. The grown-ups in my family joked about it all the time. Herman certainly never tried to hide it—I don't know if he could have.

Herman was very fond of me and my younger sister. From somewhere, he'd gotten the idea I liked shad roe. I didn't. (What seven-year-old does?—but then, perhaps he was teasing. He was so flamboyant in his every phrase and gesture—and I was such a literal-minded child—no one could be sure.) From various trips to see one sister in Baltimore or another in Washington, D.C., Herman would bring back large oval tins of shad roe as a present for me. Sundays, Mother would dredge it in egg and breadcrumbs, fry it in butter, and serve it for breakfast, exhorting me to eat just a taste, and, later, on one of Herman's visits, while I waited, silent and awed at her untruth, would tell Herman how much I'd loved it!

When, in August, some black delivery man, bent nearly double, with his shirtsleeves rolled up over wet, teak-colored arms, would push a bronze or mahogany casket on the collapsible rubber-tired

catafalque slowly and step by step along the red runner into the chapel where Herman, in his navy suit and scarlet tie, was practicing (at the actual service a black tie would replace it. But during practice, as he put it, “Mother needs *some* color about her or things will be just *too* dreary—don’t you think?”), Herman would glance over, see the man, break into an organ fanfare, rise from the bench, clap both hands to his heart, flutter them and his eyelids, roll his irises toward heaven, and exclaim, “Oh, my smellin’ salts! Get me my smellin’ salts! Boy, you come in here and do that to a woman like me, lookin’ like that? My heart can’t take it! I may just faint right here, you pretty thing!” If the delivery man had been through this before, he might stop, stand up over the coffin with sweat drops under his rough hair, and say, “What’s a’ matter with you, Herman? You one of them faggots that like men?”

But Herman’s eyes would widen in disbelief, and, drawing back, one hand to his tie, he’d declare, “Me? Oh, chile’, chile’, you must be ill or something!” Then he would march up, take the young man’s chin in his hand, and examine his face with popped, peering eyes. “Me? One of them? Why, you must have a fever, boy! I swear, you must have been workin’ out in the heat too long today. I do believe you must be sick!” Here he would feel the man’s forehead, then, removing his hand, looking at the sweat that had come off on his own palm, touch his finger to his tongue, and declare, “Oh, my lord, you are tasty! Here—” he would go on, before the man could say anything, and put both his hands flat on the delivery man’s chest, between the open buttons, and push the shirt back off the dark arms —“let me just massage them fine, strong muscles of yours and relax you and get you all comfortable so them awful and hideous ideas about me can fly out of your head forever and ever, amen! Don’t that feel good? Don’t you want a nice, lovely massage to relax all them big, beautiful muscles you got? *Umm?* Boy, how did you get so strong? Now don’t tell me you don’t like that! That’s lovely, just lovely the way it feels, isn’t it? Imagine, honey! Thinkin’ such nastiness like that about a woman like me! I mean, I just might faint right here, and you gonna have to carry me to a chair and fan me and bring me my smellin’ salts!” Meanwhile he would be

rubbing the man's chest and arms. "Ooooooh, that feels so good, I can hardly stand it myself." His voice would go up real high and he'd grin. "Honey, you feelin' a little better now?"

In the chapel corner the floor fan purred, its blades a metallic haze behind circular wires. In seersucker shorts and sandals, on the first row of wooden folding chairs painted gold with maroon plush seats, I sat, watching all this.

Different men would put up with Herman's antics for different lengths of time; and the casket delivery man (or the coal man or the plumber's assistant) would finally shrug away, laughing and pulling his shirt back up: "Aw, Herman, cut it out, now . . . !" and my father, in his vest and shirtsleeves, would come from the morgue behind the chapel, chuckling at it all, followed by a smiling Freddy, Dad's chief embalmer.

I'd smile too. Although I wasn't sure what exactly I was smiling at.

One thing I realized was that this kind of fooling around (the word "camping" I didn't hear for another half dozen years or more) was strictly masculine. It was 1948 or '49. And if my mother or another woman were present, Herman's horseplay stopped as assuredly as would my father's occasional "goddamn," "shit," "nigger, this," or "nigger, that." Yet the change of rhetoric did not seem, with Herman, at all the general male politeness/shyness before women as was the case with my father and his other, rougher friends. Herman was, if anything, more attentive to my mother than any of the others. And she was clearly fond of him. With her, he was always full of questions about us children and advice on paint and slipcovers, and consolation, sympathy, and humor about any of her domestic complaints (not to mention the cans of shad roe, packages of flowered stationery, and bags of saltwater taffy from Atlantic City), all delivered with his balding brown head far closer to my mother's, it seemed, when they talked over coffee upstairs in the kitchen, than my father's or anyone else's ever got.

Nor did I miss when, minutes after they'd been sitting around laughing at his jokes and howling over some off-color comment he'd made (but well within the boundaries of what was acceptable

for the times), just after he'd gone downstairs, one visiting cousin might declare, with a bitter face, "He's such a little fairy! I think he's disgusting," or an aunt who'd come by might shake her head and say, "Well, he certainly is . . . strange!"

Herman had a place in our social scheme—but by no means an acceptable place, and certainly not a place I wanted to fill.

Some years later, when I was fourteen or fifteen, I remember Herman, bent over, sweating, fat, stopping in to visit Freddy or my father at the funeral parlor, walking slowly, carrying some bulging shopping bag. (He no longer played the organ for us.) I would ask him how he was, and he would shake his head and declare, "I ain't well, honey. I ain't a well woman at all! Pray to the Lord you never get as sick as I been most of the last year! But you lookin' just wonderful, boy! Wonderful! *Mmmmmm!*"

And when I was eighteen, I remember going to look at him, grown from fat to obese, squeezed into his own coffin in the back chapel—the one time he got to wear his red tie at a service, which only added to that feeling always haunting the funerals of friends that this was not real death, only practice.

My own active adult sex life would begin that October—yes, the same month as my father's death—with a nervous, white-haired, middle-aged man, recently returned from Israel, who pressed his thigh against mine in the orchestra of the Amsterdam Theater on Forty-second Street, one of the old, darkly columned movie palaces where I'd gone specifically to get picked up. He'd taken me back to his apartment in Brooklyn. There'd been large locks on the doors of each of its three small rooms. After some very uninteresting sex, during which I had the only premature ejaculation of my life (but it would make me decide I was comparatively normal for at least three days; we'd been in physical contact, before and after, a minute and a half tops), we'd slept in separate rooms, he, locked in his bedroom for the night, with me left to doze on a couch in his living room, each of us idly wondering if the other weren't a psychotic maniac or worse, who would try to break in any moment and slice the other up into tiny pieces. But of course neither of us was.

But for now, as I looked at Herman in his coffin, I realized I had no notion what sexual outlets there'd been in his life. Had he gone to bars? Had he gone to baths? Had he picked up people in the afternoon in Forty-second Street movie houses or in the evenings along the benches beside Central Park West? Once a month, did he spend a night cruising the halls of the YMCA over on 135th Street where (with its decaying Aaron Douglas mural over the mirror in the barbershop), on Saturday afternoons, up till a few years before, I used to go so innocently swimming? Had there been a long-term lover waiting for him at home, unmet by, and unmentioned to, people like my father whom he'd worked for? For even though I'd pursued none of them myself, I knew these were the possibilities that lay ahead—and was desperately trying to work up the courage to explore them on my own. Was it possible, I wondered, that Herman's encounters had been confined to the touch teased from some workman; or had it even been his arms around my shoulder, his thigh against my thigh, when, years before, beside me on the organ bench, he'd taught me the proper fingering for the scale on the chapel console, before running to my parents to exclaim: "You must get that boy some piano lessons! You must! There's so much talent in his little hands, I tell you, it just breaks my heart!"—an exhortation my parents took no more seriously than they did any of his other outrageousnesses. (I was already studying the violin, anyway.) In short, had he any more outlets than I already had? I had no way to know. Herman was fat and forty when, as a child, I met him. By the time I was an adolescent who'd outgrown the child's sexual options of summer camp after lights out or the locker room after swimming but had not yet found where the adults went to play, Herman, in his fifties, was dead of diabetic complications.

Herman's funeral was among the many my father was never paid for, which changed him, in Mom's mind, from a dear and amusing friend to one of the "characters" who, she claimed, were always latching on to my father, to live off him, to drain him of money and affection, and finally to die on him.

Today I like shad roe a lot. And somehow, by the time I was nineteen and married, I had decided—from Herman and several

other gay black men I'd seen or met—that some blacks were more open about their homosexuality than many whites. My own explanation was, I suppose, that because we had less to begin with, in the end we had less to lose. Still, the openness Herman showed, as did a number of other gay men, black and white, never seemed an option for me. But I always treasured the image of Herman's outrageous and defiant freedom to say absolutely anything. . . .

Anything except, of course, I *am* queer, and I like men sexually better than women.

.....

My therapy group was composed of blacks, Hispanics, and whites in about equal numbers. In my individual hour, among the first things I'd brought up with Dr. G. was my homosexuality. After all, homosexuality was a "mental problem," if not a "mental illness"—at least in 1964. But in group session, I didn't mention it. Not talking about something like that in a therapy session seemed to me then a contradiction in terms. I discussed it with Dr. G., who said, bless him, that if talking to the group about my homosexuality made me uncomfortable, he didn't feel there was any pressing need for it. But that felt wrong to me. Lorenzo and Peter were certainly not characteristic of my homosexual experiences. Most of those experiences were far more sanguine. But to the extent that Lorenzo and Peter represented the place where those experiences left the given homosexual institutions—the bars or the baths or trucks or the cruisy movie houses—and impinged on the range of more standard social situations, they were certainly a locus of strain where such experiences became problematic and frustrating, despite whatever lesson I might have learned at the Endicott. I decided to bring it up anyway.

Was I scared? Yes!

But I was also scared not to. My breakdown had frightened me. I had no idea, at twenty-two, if group therapy in a mental hospital situation would help. But since I was there, it seemed idiotic to

waste the therapy if it was available. Therapy to me meant talking precisely about such things.

Therefore, talk, I decided, was what I'd better do.

Most of the group didn't threaten me. One Hispanic woman was there because she'd killed her baby and had ended up in the hospital, rather than in jail. One poor pear-shaped, working-class white man was obsessed with his stomach—should he walk around with it held out (rich and successful men always seemed to do this, he would explain to us, very humbly but at as great a length as we could tolerate), or should he hold it in (because sometimes that's what certain other handsome and powerful men also did)? While he was there, he never did quite get that his problem *was* his problem—rather than his inability to resolve it. His earliest memory, he told us, was of his father bloodying his mother's nose with a punch, while she clutched him, as an infant, in her arms, and the blood gushed down over him. . . . There was a pleasant, birdlike single woman, Cecile, who, when she'd been forced to retire at sixty-seven from a secretarial job she'd held since her thirties, on realizing that her options and her monies were suddenly and severely limited, had grown frightened and depressed, had refused to come out of her apartment for several weeks, and had nearly starved herself in the process. "I realize now that there's something very wrong with that—though, Lord knows, I couldn't have told you what it was when I was doing it." There was an elderly Jewish woman who had flipped out, apparently, when her eighty-six-year-old and terminally ill mother had committed suicide in the Park Avenue apartment downstairs from hers. She'd been placed in the hospital by her husband, to be "cured" by the time his winter vacation came up. And, yes, the day his vacation began, he summarily removed her from the hospital, over the protests of the doctors. She left us, on her husband's arm, whispering about how of course she was better, she had to be better, it was time to go on vacation, and, yes, she was really much better now, she felt perfectly fine, oh, she'd be just wonderful, once they got started on the trip to Colorado, they'd have a wonderful time, he'd see how much better she was. Then she'd gnaw at the lace-rimmed handkerchief around her foreknuckle,

grinding her teeth loud enough for us to hear across the lobby, while her white-haired, pin-striped husband tugged her, stumbling, toward the glass doors and car waiting outside. Also in the group was an older, white-haired man named Joe, who, from his demeanor, manicure, and sweaters, I just assumed was gay, though he'd mentioned it in group session no more than had I. There was also a black twenty-year-old woman named Beverly. Endless arguments and fights between her mother and a succession of her mother's lovers had finally driven her to live on her apartment-house roof—which is where she'd been found before she'd been brought into Mount Sinai. In all the nontherapy programs, Beverly presented herself as a ballsy black dyke. But even with the identical people, during the group session she withdrew into a near-paralyzed silence, though she claimed to have no problems talking to Dr. G. in her weekly individual hour. His presence, along with a slightly more formal seating arrangement, were the only differences in the gathering she'd seemed so comfortable and gregarious with, minutes before the official therapy hour, or indeed, minutes afterwards. But somehow the location of a chair of authority—with someone sitting in it—had much the same effect on Beverly (I couldn't help thinking) as the citadel of "the boss" had had on Sonny.

Next to them all, I guess, I felt pretty sane.

My fear of talking about my own homosexuality, however, centered on one patient. Call him Hank.

Hank was white, about my age, and a pretty aggressive fellow. Once a young woman patient had become hysterical because she didn't want to take some medication. Nurses, orderlies, and a resident had physically restrained her to give her an injection—when Hank had rushed up at her screams and started punching, putting a very surprised psychiatric resident on the floor. His own problem had something to do with his feet. They were perpetually sore, and it was often painful for him to walk. Nothing physical had been found wrong with them. He'd been transferred to the mental ward for observation on the chance his ailment was psychosomatic. Aside from occasional moments of belligerence, he was an affable



guy. I rather liked him and, I guess, wanted him to like me. But his affability also included the odd “faggot” joke, which left me dubious over talking with him about being gay, even in “group.”

Nevertheless, I’d made up my mind.

So Monday morning, when the eighteen of us were seated around on our aluminum folding chairs, I launched in: as I recall, it was the most abject of confessions. I explained the whole thing, looking fixedly at the white-and-black vinyl floor tile. I had this problem—I was homosexual, but I was really “working on it.” I was sure that, with help, I could “get better.” I went on and on like this for about five minutes, then finally glanced up at Hank—whom I’d been afraid to look at since I’d started, and for whom, in a kind of negative way, the whole performance was geared.

And I saw something.

First, he wasn’t paying much attention. He was squiggling around in his chair. And you could tell: his feet hurt him a whole lot.

Now I explained that I’d really been most worried about his reaction—to which, as I recall, he was kind of surprised. He looked up at me, a little bemused, and said that homosexuality was just something that, gee, he didn’t know too much about.

Joe, I remember, made a measured comment during one of the silences in the discussion that followed:

“I’ve had sexual experiences with men before,” he began. “Maybe this is just something you’re going through, Chip. I mean you’re married—comparatively happily, I gather—and you say you don’t have any sexual problems there. Perhaps it’s just something you’re trying out. Soon it’ll be behind you. And it won’t worry you anymore.”

“No,” I said. “No, I don’t think so. First off, I’ve been going through it ever since I was a kid. And, second, I don’t want it to stop. I like it too much. But . . .”

Which returned us to that unanswerable silence that seemed, if anything, more and more the heart of my “therapeutic” confession.

Hank’s only real comment came about an hour later, when most of us from the group were now in another room, making our potholders or picture frames. Hank suddenly turned to Joe (in his

lavender angora sweater) and baldly announced, “Now, you see I figured you were that way—” while Joe raised a silvery eyebrow in a Caucasian version of one of Herman’s grandly black and preposterous protests in the chapel.

It was lost on Hank. “But you?” He turned to me. “Now that really surprises me. I just wouldn’t have figured that for somebody like you. That’s real strange.”

I don’t know about Joe. But right then I began to wonder if perhaps the “therapeutic” value of my confession wasn’t after all more sociological than psychological. Certainly Hank wasn’t any *less* friendly to me after that, as we continued through lunch and the various occupational sessions for the rest of the day. But he didn’t tell any more “faggot” jokes—not when Joe or I was around.

The most important part of the lesson resolved for me that night, however, while I was lying in bed, thinking over the day:

Thanks to my unfounded fear of Hank’s anger (the guy—like most of the world—just had too many problems of his own), what had I managed to tell them about homosexuality, *my* homosexuality?

There in the hospital, I had not been dwelling on the physical pleasure of homosexuality, the fear and power at the beginnings of a political awareness, or the moments of community and communion with people from over an astonishing social range, or even the disappointment that came when fear or simple inequality of interest kept encounters for one or another of us too brief; what I’d been dwelling on was much more like the incidents I’ve just recounted. But in my therapy session, I’d told them nothing of my frustration with Peter’s rejective silence, my dislike of Lorenzo’s frenzied oblivion, or my boredom with the sheer banality of the Endicott dweller; nor what I’d learned from each; nor anything of the extraordinary range of alternatives the institutions that had grown up around us, however oppressed, offered us nevertheless. Where, then, had all the things I’d said that morning come from?

In the darkness of my own room, lying beside Marilyn, now and again their sources began to return. They’d come from a book by the infamous Dr. Edmund Burgler I’d read as a teenager that had explained how homosexuals were psychically retarded and that told

how homosexuals were all alcoholics who committed suicide. They had come from the section on “Inversion” by Krafft-Ebing in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which I’d also read—the scandalous paragraphs in Latin translated in faint pencil along the margins by the diligent former owner of the secondhand volume. Some of it had come from Gore Vidal’s *The City and the Pillar* and some from André Tellier’s *The Twilight Men*. Some had come from the pathos of Theodore Sturgeon’s science fiction story “The World Well Lost” and his western story “Scars.” And some had come from Jean Cocteau’s *The White Paper* and some came from André Gide’s *The Immoralist*. And some had come from James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*.

When you talk about something openly for the first time—and that, certainly, was the first time I’d talked to a public group about being gay—for better or worse, you use the public language you’ve been given. It’s only later, alone in the night, that maybe, if you’re a writer, you ask yourself how closely that language reflects your experience. And that night I realized that language had done nothing but betray me.

For all their “faggot” jokes, the Hanks of this world just weren’t interested in my abjection and my apologies, one way or the other. They’d been a waste of time. They only wounded my soul—and misinformed anyone who actually bothered to listen.

I thought about Herman—and what he had (and had not) been able to say.

## BARBARA GITTINGS

*Barbara Gittings was a pioneering activist who helped organize the first demonstrations for lesbian and gay civil rights, worked to have homosexuality declassified as a mental illness, and worked closely with the American Library Association to promote LGBTQ literature. In this passage from her partner Kay Tobin Lahusen's book The Gay Crusaders, Gittings recounts her early experiences cross-dressing and going to gay bars in the 1950s, as well as how she became an activist.*

### From *The Gay Crusaders*

“On weekends, dressed as a boy, I’d hitch rides with truckers up Route 1 to New York City to go to the gay bars. At first I didn’t know of any gay bars in Philadelphia. I had a lot of trouble getting plugged into the gay community. I spent agonized years trying to find a comfortable social life, and the bars were the only place I had to start looking. Since I didn’t have much money and didn’t like to drink anyway, I’d hold a glass of ice water and pretend it was gin on the rocks. I’d get into conversation with other women but I’d usually find we didn’t really have any common interests, we just happened both to be gay. I just didn’t run into any lesbians who shared my interests in books and hostel trips and baroque music. They all seemed to groove on Peggy Lee and Frank Sinatra and nothing older! It was only later, in other settings, that I found gay people I was really congenial with. In those days I felt there was no real place for me in the straight culture, but the gay bar culture wasn’t the place for me either. It was a painful and confusing time in my life.

“I wore drag because I thought that was a way to show I was gay. It’s changed now, but in the early ’50s there were basically two

types of women in the gay bars, the so-called butch ones in short hair and plain masculine attire and the so-called femme ones in dresses and high heels and makeup. I knew high heels and makeup weren't my personal style, so I thought, well, I must be the other kind! And I dressed accordingly. What a waste of time and energy! I was really a mixed-up kid.

"The only other models, the only other images of homosexual people I had to look to were in the books, and there too, much was made of differentiating both lesbians and male homosexuals into masculine and feminine types. This differentiating is disappearing very fast today, not only for gays but for straights too. Nowadays people generally feel freer to look and act whatever way they feel most comfortable, and they don't so readily follow set patterns.

"It was risky as well as inappropriate for me to be in drag. One night in Philadelphia, I left a mixed bar with a male gay acquaintance, and outside there were two marines who put on brass knuckles and attacked my friend. 'We'd beat you up, too, sonny, if you weren't wearing glasses,' one told me. When they left, I took my companion to the hospital where he had thirteen stitches put in his face."

Saturdays in New York Barbara spent combing musty Fourth Avenue secondhand bookstores looking for more gay fiction. "In most of the novels homosexuality brought suffering or downright tragedy. Even so, they represented a history, a people, a sense of community. For me, these books were a large part of my early liberation. My sense of myself as a lesbian came from the fiction literature, certainly not from psychiatry-drenched texts."

Soon she had the beginnings of a valuable collection. She gave up methodically building it only when she discovered in the late '50s that a few other book buffs were way ahead of her—such as Dr. Jeannette Foster, author of *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, and Gene Damon, current editor of the lesbian-feminist magazine *The Ladder*. Barbara maintains that Gene Damon "almost certainly has the most extensive private collection of gay literature in the country, particularly lesbian literature, with many rare items." Barbara's book collecting today concentrates on non-fiction as she keeps tabs

on all the current pro and con materials on homosexuality. Most of her fiction collection lies tucked away in cartons.

In her early twenties Barbara had her first serious love relationship and at last entered a milieu where she learned that drag and role-playing were not necessary to lesbian life. While visiting a straight friend at Swarthmore College, Barbara met several gay women at the school. One in turn introduced her to a black writer and poet. Barbara was immediately attracted to this woman—"she was a very warm person, and very self-determining"—and soon they entered a difficult affair that lasted half a year. The two planned to go to Mexico together. Barbara (who by then was working for the architectural firm) gave notice on her job, got a visa and started packing. Unexpectedly her lover chose to end the affair, leaving alone for Mexico. "I fell apart in a way," says Barbara. Advancing lame excuses to her boss for her change in plans, Barbara begged (successfully) for her job back and returned to a workaday existence.

Finally she found the gay movement. "I had sought out Donald Webster Cory, author of *The Homosexual in America*, and he told me of the Mattachine Society in San Francisco. For my vacation in 1956 I flew to the West Coast and showed up at the Mattachine office with a rucksack on my back. I'd planned to do some hiking out there. And I did—right over to Daughters of Bilitis which the Mattachine men told me about. It was an exciting time to arrive. They were just planning their first issue of *The Ladder*. The dozen or so women I met there, including Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, provided me with a much better sense of lesbianism and the lesbian community than I'd ever had before."

Barbara was enthusiastic enough to become a founder and key organizer of DOB's first chapter on the East Coast, in New York City. "We formed in late 1958 with the help and encouragement of the Mattachine Society of New York, which gave us meeting space and other support. At the time there were no newspapers, not even the *Village Voice*, that would take ads for gay groups. So all *Ladder* subscribers within a big radius of New York were notified. Eight or ten showed up, and that's how we started. I was elected the first

chapter president and served for 3 years. Almost every weekend for many months I took the bus—I was no longer hitching rides!—from Philadelphia to New York to keep the chapter rolling. We had a busy schedule of Gab-n-Java sessions, buffet suppers, business meetings, and lectures. And we built up a mailing list of nearly 300.” Barbara also did most of the work on their newsletter, including stenciling and mimeographing after hours at her office, then typing and stuffing envelopes to ensure absolute security for those on the mailing list.

“I’ve always been a joiner,” she admits. “Some people just like to get in there and pitch. And at that time, the idea that there were organizations of the people I identified with most closely was extremely appealing. Still, I didn’t have then the strong movement or cause orientation that I have now. It seemed enough that gay people were getting together, never mind why, in a setting other than the bars.”

Barbara reviews the evolution of the gay movement during the late 50’s and 60’s. “At first we told ourselves we were getting together to learn more about the nature of homosexuality and to let other people know. We looked for ‘sympathetic’ psychiatrists and lawyers and clergymen who would say things that made us feel a bit better about ourselves. In retrospect, I think this was a very necessary stage to go through. The movement we have today could not have developed if there hadn’t been this earlier effort to get over the really severe feelings of inadequacy about being gay that most of our people had.

“Also we talked about doing something, such as getting laws changed, to ease things a little. Later we began to claim we were entitled to some rights. I recall that a homosexual bill of rights was the subject of an early gay group conference on the West Coast, and the bill of rights proved so controversial the delegates from one group walked out of the meeting. There was still a strong feeling that if we spoke nicely and reasonably and played by the rules of the game, we could persuade heterosexuals that homosexuals were all right as human beings.

“Later yet we came to the position that the ‘problem’ of homosexuality isn’t ours at all—it’s society’s, and society should change to accommodate us, not try to change us. This was the era of ‘Gay Is Good.’ Now we were no longer merely responding to the initiatives of others and hoping to be accepted. We were demanding our rights and insisting that society respond to us and deal with us on our own terms.”

When Barbara met Frank Kameny in 1963, “he was the first gay person I met who took firm, uncompromising positions about homosexuality and homosexuals’ right to be considered fully on par with heterosexuals. He was more positive than any other gay activist on the scene. At the time there was still a lurking feeling in the movement that homosexuals as persons should be accepted and have their rights but that homosexuality itself need not be valued as highly as heterosexuality. Frank really raised my consciousness on this matter! Also thanks partly to him, I got turned on to gay civil rights issues.”

Barbara marched in the picket lines when they began in 1965. “I felt very proud that gay people were taking this step, and proud to be part of it. Those pickets were our earliest form of confrontation.”



## ERNESTINE ECKSTEIN

*Ernestine Eckstein was a leader in the New York City chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis. She was one of the few visible African American lesbian activists in the 1960s after appearing on the cover of the lesbian journal The Ladder. In her Ladder interview, Eckstein discusses the importance of political demonstrations and relations between the African American civil rights movement and lesbian and gay activism.*

### From “Interview with Ernestine”

(This interview with Ernestine Eckstein—our cover subject this month—was conducted by Kay Tobin and Barbara Gittings in January 1966. Miss Eckstein was at the time vice-president of the New York Chapter of Daughters of Bilitis. The opinions she expressed were her own and not necessarily those of DOB.)

*Q. To start with a stock question, how did you hear of DOB?*

A. Through the public lectures sponsored by Mattachine Society of New York—which I also belong to now. They were advertised in the *Village Voice*, and I have this thing about going to lectures anyway. So I’d go, and pick up Mattachine literature from the literature table, and their magazine mentioned DOB’s name and address. I can’t strongly enough recommend homophile magazines’ “plugging other homophile groups.” I don’t know how I’d lived in such a vacuum but I’d simply never heard about DOB before, or for that matter about Mattachine.

*Q. Where were you living before you came to New York?*

A. I was at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, where I was majoring in magazine journalism, with minors in government and in Russian. However, I had a lot of faith in New York. That's why I came here after graduation three years ago. It seemed to me, for a lot of reasons, that New York was the place to live. I consider it very stimulating. It was the only place to live so far as I was concerned.

*Q. Did you know when you came here that you were a lesbian?*

A. No, I didn't. I had been attracted to various teachers and girlfriends, but nothing ever came of it.

*Q. Did you know there were homosexuals in college?*

A. It's very hard to explain this, but I had never known about homosexuality, I'd never thought about it. It's funny, because I'd always had a very strong attraction to women. But I'd never known anyone who was homosexual, not in grade school or high school or in college. Never heard the word mentioned. And I wasn't a dumb kid, you know, but this was a kind of blank that had never been filled in by anything—reading, experience, anything—until after I came to New York when I was twenty-two. I look back and I wonder! I didn't know there were other people who felt the same way I did.

*Q. What did you used to think about your uniqueness, how did it affect you?*

A. I used to think, "Well, now, what's wrong with me?" But at the same time I felt there was nothing unusual about people loving other people regardless of sex. I've always believed that love transcends any kind of label—black, white, woman, man. So I didn't think it was unnatural for me to have reactions to other women.

Why not? However, I'd never thought about sexual activities between those of the same sex.

*Q. What happened after you came to New York?*

A. Well, as a matter of fact, I had a college friend who had come here earlier. He was my best friend in college. It wasn't a sexual relationship, never even a romantic one. Very platonic. And he was a homosexual, but I didn't know it then, he didn't tell me. Anyway, we had a very good relationship going in college. We could do everything together, really communicate. Just the best of friends. And I liked it that way and so did he. I never understood why—but I never questioned why either. So when I came to New York he was one of the first persons I looked up. And he said, "Ah . . . Ernestine, you know I'm gay?" And I thought: well, you're happy, so what? I didn't know the term gay! And he explained it to me.

Then all of a sudden things began to click. Because at that time I was sort of attracted to my roommate, and I thought: am I sexually as well as emotionally attracted to her? And it dawned on me that I was. And so my college friend sort of introduced me to the homosexual community he knew. Still, I went through the soul-searching bit for several months, trying to decide if I was homosexual, where I stood.

But then having once decided, the next thing on the agenda was to find a way of being in the homosexual movement—because I assumed there was such a movement, or should be. And at that time I saw the New York Mattachine ads in the *Village Voice*.

*Q. Do you think that because you were accustomed to thinking of the Negro movement with its organizations, you automatically felt that homosexuals would have organizations?*

A. Yes, that was a definite influence.

*Q. There are some white people who have the impression that there is so much sexual freedom among Negroes that they naturally know all about homosexuality, that they try everything! What do you say to this notion?*

A. When people talk about sexual freedom among Negroes, I think what they may mean is that Negroes have less inhibition generally, also that they have fewer other outlets. But I don't agree that there are any sexual differences between Negroes and whites. There may be more freedom for Negroes to participate in sex—but not a variety of sex.

I think there is more freedom to try different things among whites than among Negroes. Negroes are *not* now at the stage where they can begin to explore. They're still very caught up with other people's definitions of how to live. So they can't explore yet. Which is one of the reasons why I've never gone with a Negro girl. I prefer people who are free to try things and see how they work, people who can define their own values. And Negroes by and large don't do this yet. There's a fear of not being accepted if they try anything new or different.

*Q. Do you find that your closest friends are homosexual?*

A. No, I don't. I wish it were true. I'm always reaching toward a complete communication with people, and I would like to be able to really communicate with a Negro lesbian. This would be a perfect situation so far as I'm concerned.

*Q. If your closest friends are heterosexual, have you told them you're a lesbian, and do you communicate well with them?*

A. Most of my close friends know I'm a lesbian. I do find there's a sort of gap in communication that can only be overcome with a lot of effort. For instance, one of my colleagues at work who's a very close friend of mine has just gotten married. So she talks to me in

terms of her being *a wife* having a *husband*. And I talk to her in terms of my being *a lesbian*, having a *girlfriend*. And we talk, but it's still very strange. Our problems are so different. So there is a gap. It can be overcome, but it takes effort.

*Q. I have had heterosexual friends argue with me that heterosexual love is by its very nature more fulfilling than homosexual love. What would you say to this?*

A. I can only speak from my own experience, and all I can say to that is that I've known heterosexual love, and comparing the two, I find homosexual love preferable. Speaking again personally, it is much more beneficial to me. I communicate much more easily, sexually and in every other way, with a woman. I can reach a much closer kind of unity with a woman than I ever could with a man. Because after all the whole object of love is to reach a kind of unified state. And homosexual love enables me to do this, in essence. But let every man speak for himself!

*Q. Have you found any discrimination against Negroes in the homophile movement?*

A. No, I feel the homophile movement is more open to Negroes than, say, a lot of churches, for example. Unfortunately, I find that there are very few Negroes in the homophile movement. I keep looking for them, but they're not there. And I think there should be more, I really do.

*Q. Have you been active in the Negro civil rights movement?*

A. At Indiana University I was active in the NAACP chapter there, and I was an officer of the chapter in my senior year. At the time I was there, there was no other organization, no other choice. Then

suddenly more progressive groups like CORE and SNCC came along, and I got out of NAACP and joined CORE when I came to New York.

*Q. There's an article by William Worthy in The Realist for September 1965 in which he claims that NAACP was "emasculated" by the white liberals in the organization. Worthy says that the white liberals' influence has had a "fatal, debilitating effect"—because they donate money and lend prestige and then expect that NAACP will go along with their ideas for slower progress, and will defer to their wishes. Do you agree here?*

A. You have to remember that NAACP's whole policy was structured with the white liberals in mind. I think they have more influence than they should have, but I don't think they can be said to have "emasculated" NAACP. Without the financial support of the white liberals, the NAACP wouldn't have gone anywhere anyway, so I think it was a choice that had to be made.

*Q. Does this choice then account for NAACP's conservatism?*

A. I think it does, historically, yes. More so than any other single factor. But you also have to take into account the fact that the NAACP is made up of middle-class Negroes who are every bit as conservative as white liberals. So there is this combination of forces in NAACP. The square Negroes are very conservative and very frightened. They've reached a certain level in society, and any kind of protest really seems a threat to them. Because if the whole mass of Negroes were raised up, then the position of these middle-class Negroes would not be singular, not be distinctive anymore. I don't say they deliberately try to hold the mass of Negroes down. But they just don't make any big effort to help.

*Q. There are some people who feel that to demonstrate or make any kind of public protest is somehow not nice. Do you think this too is*

*tied in with middle-class values?*

A. Right. And most Negroes do have middle-class values, they really do. They absorb them.

*Q. I brought up these points because there are parallels in the homophile movement. Some homosexuals prefer to work through influential heterosexuals and also to have them in our movement even to the extent of having them on the governing boards of our organizations, where they can wield a great deal of influence in determining the way things go. Other homosexuals feel we should work with the prominent heterosexuals who want to support our movement and that it's fine to get their help, but that we shouldn't let them control or determine the way things go, shouldn't allow them to take over to any degree or gain a superior influence. What do you think?*

A. I think Negroes need white people, and I think homosexuals need heterosexuals. If you foster cooperation right from the start, then everyone is involved and it's not a movement *over there*.

*Q. What if the "outsiders" get superior influence?*

A. I think that's a chance we take. I would prefer cooperation, equality.

*Q. But the white liberal, for example, doesn't feel the same strong motivation to get things done that the Negro civil rights worker feels. And similarly in our cause, the heterosexual doesn't share the homosexual's strong motivation. And so there are those in the homophile movement who fear that influential heterosexuals in our movement might hold us back.*

A. True. But that's why I feel so strongly that an organization should be formulated with a definite aim in mind and then the membership should fall in line with this aim.

*Q. But the outsiders can modify the tactics used and make them less dynamic, even if they don't modify the aims.*

A. I think this is a justifiable fear, but I think it's a chance we must take. I would like to see in the homophile movement more people who can *think*. And I don't believe we ought to look at their titles or at their sexual orientation. Movements should be intended, I feel, to *erase* labels, whether "black" or "white" or "homosexual" or "heterosexual."

*Q. Would you give us your opinion of picketing? Some people consider it radical, or untimely, or both. What do you say?*

A. Picketing I regard as almost a conservative activity now. The homosexual has to call attention to the fact that he's been unjustly acted upon. This is what the Negro did.

*Q. Let me tie this in with what we discussed a moment ago. There are those in our movement who want prominent persons, especially from the psychology and therapy professions, on our governing boards and in our organizations—feeling that these persons will lend not only prestige but good judgment. Yet we find that almost to a man, these psychology-oriented persons tell us, "Don't picket." They say we must first educate the public. Some homosexuals fault them for this and say, well, they're heterosexual and they're not suffering the way we are.*

A. But I do regard picketing as a form of education! But one thing that disturbs me a lot is that there seems to be some sort of premium placed on psychologists and therapists by the homophile



movement. I personally don't understand why that should be. So far as I'm concerned, homosexuality per se is not a sickness. When our groups seek out the therapists and psychologists, to me this is admitting we are ill by the very nature of our preference. And this disturbs me very much.

*Q. What do you think of as sickness?*

A. To me, a sickness represents a maladjustment. That would include Negroes who can't adjust to being Negroes, and homosexuals who can't adjust to being homosexuals. Such people may fail to adapt or to function properly in a society.

*Q. Surely though you must think that some degree of anxiety would be legitimate in a hostile society. That is, if you're a cat in a world of dogs . . .*

A. Yes, that's true. I think it takes a very strong, independent-minded person to accept all the pressures and to function well in spite of them. I think some homosexuals do find it hard to overcome these pressures—not because they are homosexuals per se, but because of the pressures exerted by society and the prohibitions against homosexuality.

*Q. Then do you think the homosexual's anxieties are helped best by a therapist or by his being with like-minded people?*

A. I think the best therapy for a homosexual is reinforcement of his way of life, by associating with people who are like him. I think the whole anxiety business comes in when he is constantly pitted against a different way of life—you know, where he's the odd-ball. I believe homosexuals need this sort of reinforcement that comes from being with their own kind. And if they don't have it, then they

have to be awfully strong to create their own image. Most people are not that strong.

*Q. Would you say the burden of change is on society or on the homosexual, if his lot is to be improved?*

A. I think to a certain extent it's on both. The homosexual has to assert himself more, and society has to give more. Homosexuals are invisible, except for the stereotypes, and I feel homosexuals have to become visible and to assert themselves politically. Once homosexuals do this, society will start to give more and more.

*Q. You think more homosexuals should declare themselves, and get in homophile picket lines and so forth?*

A. Any movement needs a certain number of courageous people, there's no getting around it. They have to come out on behalf of the cause and accept whatever consequences come. Most lesbians that I know endorse homophile picketing, but will not picket themselves. *I will* get in a picket line, but in a different city. For example, I picketed at Independence Hall in Philadelphia on July Fourth last year, and at the White House in October, to protest discrimination against homosexuals.

*Q. Were you concerned about being seen on television here, since CBS-TV and ABC-TV covered most of the demonstrations?*

A. I'm not worried about that. I think eventually my philosophy will reach a point where I'll decide that it's my right to picket, whatever the cause, whatever the city and no matter what my job is. I don't quite have that much courage yet.

*Q. Do you believe in any forms of civil disobedience for the homophile movement at this time?*

A. I think our movement is not ready for any forms of civil disobedience. I think this would solidify resistance to our cause. This situation will change eventually. But not now.

*Q. Are there any ways in which you feel our movement should emulate other movements more?*

A. I don't find in the homophile movement enough stress on courtroom action. I would like to see more test cases in courts, so that our grievances can be brought out into the open. That's one of the ways for a movement to gain exposure, a way that's completely acceptable to everybody.

## JUDY GRAHN

*Poet and scholar Judy Grahn played a major role in the emergence of LGBTQ literature in the 1970s and in the creation of the women's spirituality movement. In this fantastic prose poem, she critiques the homophobia and enforced gender conformity of psychoanalysis, which played a major role in the oppression of LGBTQ people.*

### “The Psychoanalysis of Edward the Dyke”

Behind the brown door which bore the gilt letters of Dr. Merlin Knox's name, Edward the Dyke was lying on the doctor's couch which was so luxurious and long that her feet did not even hang over the edge.

“Dr. Knox,” Edward began, “my problem this week is chiefly concerning restrooms.”

“Aahh,” the good doctor sighed. Gravely he drew a quick sketch of a restroom in his notebook.

“Naturally I can't go into men's restrooms without feeling like an interloper, but on the other hand every time I try to use the ladies room I get into trouble.”

“Umm,” said Dr. Knox, drawing a quick sketch of a door marked “Ladies.”

“Four days ago I went into the powder room of a department store and three middle-aged housewives came in and thought I was a man. As soon as I explained to them that I was really only a harmless dyke, the trouble began . . .”

“You compulsively attacked them.”

“Oh heavens no, indeed not. One of them turned on the water faucet and tried to drown me with wet paper towels, but the other two began screaming something about how well did I know

Gertrude Stein and what sort of underwear did I have on, and they took my new cuff links and socks for souvenirs. They had my head in the trash can and were cutting pieces off my shirttail when luckily a policeman heard my calls for help and rushed in. He was able to divert their attention by shooting at me, thus giving me a chance to escape through the window.”

Carefully Dr. Knox noted in his notebook: “Apparent suicide attempt after accosting girls in restroom.” “My child,” he murmured in featherly tones, “have no fear. You must trust us. We will cure you of this deadly affliction, and before you know it you’ll be all fluffy and wonderful with dear babies and a bridge club of your very own.” He drew a quick sketch of a bridge club. “Now let me see. I believe we estimated that after only four years of intensive therapy and two years of anti-intensive therapy, plus a few minor physical changes and you’ll be exactly the little girl we’ve always wanted you to be.” Rapidly Dr. Knox thumbed through an index on his desk. “Yes yes. This year the normal cup size is 56 inches. And waist 12 and ½. Nothing a few well-placed hormones can’t accomplish in these advanced times. How tall did you tell me you were?”

“Six feet, four inches,” replied Edward.

“Oh, tsk tsk.” Dr. Knox did some figuring. “Yes, I’m afraid that will definitely entail extracting approximately 8 inches from each leg, including the knee-cap . . . standing a lot doesn’t bother you, does it my dear?”

“Uh,” said Edward, who couldn’t decide.

“I assure you the surgeon I have in mind for you is remarkably successful.” He leaned far back in his chair. “Now tell me, briefly, what the word ‘homosexuality’ means to you, in your own words.”

“Love flowers pearl, of delighted arms. Warm and water. Melting of vanilla wafer in the pants. Pink petal roses trembling overdew on the lips, soft and juicy fruit. No teeth. No nasty spit. Lips chewing oysters without grimy sand or whiskers. Pastry. Gingerbread. Warm, sweet bread. Cinnamon toast poetry. Justice equality higher wages. Independent angel song. It means I can do what I want.”

“Now my dear,” Dr. Knox said, “Your disease has gotten completely out of control. We scientists know of course that it’s a

highly pleasurable experience to take someone's penis or vagina into your mouth—it's pleasurable and enjoyable. Everyone knows that. But after you've taken a thousand pleasurable penises or vaginas into your mouth and had a thousand people take your pleasurable penis or vagina into their mouth, what have you accomplished? What have you got to show for it? Do you have a wife or children or a husband or a home or a trip to Europe? Do you have a bridge club to show for it? No! You have only a thousand pleasurable experiences to show for it. Do you see how you're missing the meaning of life? How sordid and depraved are these clandestine sexual escapades in parks and restrooms? I ask you."

"But sir but sir," said Edward, "I'm a *woman*. I don't have sexual escapades in parks or restrooms. I don't have a thousand lovers—I have *one* lover."

"Yes yes." Dr. Knox flicked the ashes from his cigar, onto the floor. "Stick to the subject, my dear."

"We were in college then," Edward said. "She came to me out of the silky midnight mist, her slips rustling like cow thieves, her hair blowing in the wind like Gabriel. Lying in my arms harps played soft in dry firelight, Oh Bach. Oh Brahms. Oh Buxtehude. How sweetly we got along how well we got the woods pregnant with canaries and parakeets, barefoot in the grass alas pigeons, but it only lasted ten years and she was gone, poof! like a puff of wheat."

"You see the folly of these brief, physical embraces. But tell me the results of our experiment we arranged for you last session."

"Oh yes. My real date. Well I bought a dress and a wig and a girdle and a squeezey bodice. I did unspeakable things to my armpits with a razor. I had my hair done and my face done and my nails done. My roast done. My bellybutton done."

"And then you felt truly feminine."

"I felt truly immobilized. I could no longer run, walk bend stoop move my arms or spread my feet apart."

"Good, good."

"Well, everything went pretty well during dinner, except my date was only 5'3" and oh yes. One of my eyelashes fell into the soup—that wasn't too bad. I hardly noticed it going down. But then my

other eyelash fell on my escort's sleeve and he spent five minutes trying to kill it."

Edward sighed. "But the worst part came when we stood up to go. I rocked back on my heels as I pushed my chair back under the table and my shoes—you see they were three inchers, raising me to 6'7", and with all my weight on those teeny little heels. . . ."

"Yes yes."

"I drove the spikes all the way into the thick carpet and could no longer move. Oh, everyone was nice about it. My escort offered to get the check and to call in the morning to see how I had made out and the manager found a little saw and all. But, Dr. Knox, you must understand that my underwear was terribly binding and the room was hot . . ."

"Yes yes."

"So I fainted. I didn't *mean* to, I just did. That's how I got my ankles broken."

Dr. Knox cleared his throat. "It's obvious to me, young lady, that you have failed to control your P.E."

"My God," said Edward, glancing quickly at her crotch, "I took a bath just before I came."

"This oral eroticism of yours is definitely rooted in Penis Envy, which showed when you deliberately castrated your date by publicly embarrassing him."

Edward moaned. "But strawberries. But lemon cream pie."

"Narcissism," Dr. Knox droned, "Masochism, Sadism. Admit you want to kill your mother."

"Marshmallow bluebird," Edward groaned, eyes softly rolling. "Looking at the stars. April in May."

"Admit you want to possess your father. Mother substitute. Breast suckle."

"Graham cracker subway," Edward writhed, slobbering. "Pussy willow summer."

"Admit you have a smegmatic personality," Dr. Knox intoned.

Edward rolled to the floor. "I am vile! I am vile!"

Dr. Knox flipped a switch at his elbow and immediately a picture of a beautiful woman appeared on a screen over Edward's head. The

doctor pressed another switch and electric shocks jolted through her spine. Edward screamed. He pressed another switch, stopping the flow of electricity. Another switch and a photo of a gigantic erect male organ flashed into view, coated in powdered sugar. Dr. Knox handed Edward a lollipop.

She sat up. "I'm saved," she said, tonguing the lollipop.

"Your time is up," Dr. Knox said. "Your check please. Come back next week."

"Yes sir yes sir," Edward said as she went out the brown door. In his notebook, Dr. Knox made a quick sketch of his bank.



# MARIO MARTINO

*In 1968, Mario Martino started the Labyrinth Foundation Counseling Service, the first counseling service for trans men in New York. This excerpt outlines the challenges he and his friends faced in changing their birth certificates and identification after gender-affirming surgery in the 1960s, which led Martino to start the foundation.*

## From *Emergence: A Transsexual Autobiography*

I was discharged five days after surgery. My experience here at this hospital had been exemplary and we had only praise for every staff member we met. Dr. Brown's splendid stitch work was removed on the seventh day. He asked permission to present my case to the surgical board meeting that month and I granted it, of course. I would even have appeared before the board if it would have been helpful to other transsexuals.

Becky went back to school, and I had a few days with Jan and Jim, then home again for six weeks' rest. Already I was restless, wanting to get busy again.

I'd taken the second step in affirming my male gender. It was something I'd anticipated and worked toward and now I felt positively wonderful. Wonderful!

Lots of time to think during my convalescence, and I wanted nothing more now than that Becky and I marry.



Never having had a problem with the law, I had supposed that lawyers were akin to my old-fashioned ideas about doctors:

professional, humanitarian. An appointment with one lawyer was to shatter these illusions. Insensitive, cruel. Crude. Upon hearing my reasons for needing name and gender change on my legal papers, he exploded: “Why did you have your tits whacked off?” He did not wait for an answer. “You must be sick—or somethin’. Why don’t you just go on livin’ with the broad?” (Echoes of Dr. Patterson!) But he hadn’t finished. “Resign yourself to being a lesbian!”

Why bother to explain that the woman who believes herself to be a man, who wants in every way to be a man, is not a lesbian—she is a transsexual? I couldn’t get out of there fast enough.

A most disconcerting experience. It was to leave me wary. I hoped I’d rid myself of that apprehension with a more reputable attorney.

Never would I have more time than the present. I gathered up my courage, sought out another legal man, and took Bill along. His problems were identical to my own.

The office of counselor Wentzel was in the shopping center, and the waiting room, dreary and windowless, should have forewarned us. No evidence of a secretary. Still, I told myself, we can’t judge books by covers—give the man a chance. Maybe he’s so honest he makes no pretense at show.

Wentzel personified *the mouthpiece*. His mouth was loud, his words came too fast, his vocabulary peppered with obscenities.

How could I possibly have found my first and second lawyers so lacking in professionalism? Well, we’re here in Wentzel’s office, I thought, let’s get on with it.

“You are reputed to be knowledgeable in name and sex change on legal documents for transsexuals, Mr. Wentzel. What is your price?”

“Four hundred dollars. But first, I’ll have to see what judge will even listen to me about your cases. Damn controversial, y’know.” He smirked. “When we find that judge, then we can work out a plan of payment.”

“When do you think you’ll find that judge?”

“Damned impatient, ain’t ya? How do I know—I can’t promise swift action.”

We had to be satisfied with that. Bill felt as defeated as I did. Something was very wrong here. The waiting was ridiculous.

Six months went by and we called and visited Wentzel's dingy little office as often as we dared, admitted because we always brought in our payments. And then, one day, his announcement came almost as a surprise: "Your papers are finished—but, well, the judge struck out that part of the order which says that the birth certificate must be amended to now read *male gender*."

"I can't believe it!"

Wentzel began his usual whining: "You sound just like damn crybabies. You can't have your cake and eat it. Be happy with what you got."

"You've made fools out of us!" Bill exploded.

"How dare you play us along like this? What we got is a mess. We've paid our money because you led us to believe that our papers would be done as submitted. Now: nothing more than a name change—and out \$400! We're very little better off than before."

He looked at us with those sly eyes. "Heh-heh! I guess the reason you had to wait so long was the judge's way of getting back at *me*. I'd promised him a male-to-female so he could write a test case on it—and when I came up with two females-to-males he got mad as hops. He could've signed those damn papers in one minute but he wanted me to sweat."

How could this man have passed the bar? It had just been our bad luck to meet up with two shady lawyers.

Another goal for myself: I'd learn about law.

Now Wentzel quoted an additional fee to continue with our cases, but we said we weren't interested. Since it was up to us personally to get all our papers (letters from physicians and psychiatrists, old birth certificates and similar documents), we decided to write our home states and ask requirements for sex change on our respective birth certificates. Replies from both states came promptly and read something like this:

Send a court order for change of name and the letter from a physician and we will amend your certificate for \$2.

Just as promptly we wrote our own affidavits, and the doctors and surgeons involved affixed their signatures. With this signed affidavit, check for \$2 and an eight-cent stamp our sex was changed on our birth records and new copies forwarded posthaste to both Bill and me.

Literally, I jumped for joy when my little piece of paper arrived. It helped restore the dignity I'd been in danger of losing along the way, through the hostilities at the hospital and the shenanigans of the shysters.

I traveled to the state capital to have my nurse's license changed and stayed overnight with friends. Connie, the wife, offered to go with me. Changing one's sex legally was not without its complications, and I felt apprehensive on approaching the building where, earlier, I'd taken state boards for my R.N. An armed guard stood at every door, and I broke into a sweat as Connie and I neared the desk just outside the door of a room filled with the shrill of phones and chattering people. We were asked to register before entering the room, and just signing my name added to my agitation. What would I say if this unknown woman, this Miss X, should break into raucous laughter or utter some unkindness after reading this court order?

How would she handle this delicate problem?

I handed the order to Miss X and sat down in the chair beside her desk, Connie close enough to press my knee for reassurance.

"What is your name now? Is the last name the same?"

"My name is Mario Martino—the last name is the same."

She was courteous and kind. My good luck. She excused herself, went over to a long file and pulled my pink card with all the vital statistics of my professional career, starting when I first filled it out four years ago. How vividly I recalled having written *female* on that card! However, this admirable creature did not flinch as she compared my license (which read "Martino, Marie Josephine") with the court order.

"Well, Mr. Martino," this blithe spirit commented, "it must have been difficult for you to go through life with this name."

"Yes. Something like that . . ."

The tensions released, the three of us laughed happily together, and people turned to look and wonder at our light-heartedness in this strictly business office in the state's capitol.

Miss X excused herself, took a new license form to the typist, and waited for her to finish before returning to her own desk.

"If you should ever want your large parchment license for framing you will return the original and pay a fee of \$7."

"Should I! Sooner than you think."

Miss X wished us luck and turned to the next applicant. Signing ourselves out, Connie and I embraced openly in the hall and were sure any onlookers would naturally assume we'd just come from the marriage license bureau.

Mine was the first request on record for name change on a nursing license. Next on my agenda was that social security card. In each case it was necessary only to present the legal court order.

All my papers were now in order. *Legally, I was completely male!*

On a lark I called Becky at school.

"Becky, will you marry me?"

"Well," she teased, "do you think we've known each other long enough?"

We'd marry in January, we decided. We'd waited a lifetime, it seemed to us, and we hoped we'd be happy ever after.

Could we measure up to the fairy tales?

Well, since ours was a world of reality, we'd have to work at happiness.

## CRAIG RODWELL

*Craig Rodwell was active with the Mattachine Society of New York and his own organization, Homophile Youth Movement in Neighborhoods (HYMN), and helped to organize the first LGBTQ pride march, Christopher Street Liberation Day 1970, which commemorated the Stonewall uprising. In this interview he discusses the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop, the first LGBTQ bookstore, which he opened in 1967.*

### From *The Gay Crusaders*

After graduating from high school, Craig came east. He had a scholarship to study at the School of American Ballet, the official school of the New York City Ballet company. Yet his real reason for wanting to be in New York, he says, was to stuff envelopes and do work around the office of the Mattachine Society of New York. The then-emerging movement was “my main, consuming interest in life. And not from an altruistic viewpoint. It fulfilled me personally.” But New York Mattachine wasn’t bold enough then for Craig, so he also joined with Randy Wicker’s Homosexual League of New York and participated in the first gay picket in the U.S.—in 1963 at the Whitehall Street induction center, where less than a dozen picketers protested violation of the confidentiality of draft records of gays. “We got no attention whatsoever to our demonstration or our press releases,” Craig remembers. “One sergeant stood and looked out the door at us, that’s all.”

Meanwhile, Craig experimented from time to time with cross-dressing. He put a sequined collar on his Siamese cat, donned some audacious drag, and headed for 42nd Street along with other young gay men from the ballet school. “We only did it occasionally, and

not because we were driven to it, but because it was just the thing to do. We were going along with societal expectations.”

By 1965, New York Mattachine had reversed its anti-picketing policy and assumed a more activist stance. Craig was among those most responsible for the changeover, and he coined the slogan “Let’s get Mattachine moving!” The refurbishment of New York Mattachine also hinged on a reexamination of the sickness theory, with the old guard wanting to take no stand on the matter or actually believing homosexuality to be an illness, and the new guard wanting to adopt a statement similar to the one framed by Mattachine of Washington: “In the absence of valid evidence to the contrary, homosexuality is not a sickness, disturbance, or other pathology in any sense, but is merely a preference, orientation, or propensity, on par with and not different in kind from heterosexuality.”

The new guard had its way. Craig, who was then in charge of membership, reports that membership doubled. Monthly lectures at New York’s Freedom House were a huge success. Craig organized the first chartered buses to carry New York gays to pickets held in Washington, D.C. and in Philadelphia. “At the time, a total of 50 or 60 gay people was a big demonstration,” he explains. “The men wore suits and ties, the women wore dresses. Except for our ‘Equality for Homosexuals’ buttons, we looked like a church group going for an outing!”

Though a later *New York Times Magazine* article featured one picture of an early picket, the first pickets, Craig says with a smile, got their biggest press notice from magazines like *Confidential*, which ran an article in October 1965 under the heading “Homos on the March.”

However, a “Sip-In” demonstration in New York in the summer of 1966 was well reported in the *Times*, the *New York Post*, and the *Village Voice*. Gay people were indignant that bars could take advantage of a State Liquor Authority regulation prohibiting service to homosexuals; and when a sign “If You’re Gay, Stay Away” appeared in an East Village bar, Craig and two other members of New York Mattachine collected press people and turned up at the

bar for a confrontation which was to be a sip-in, paralleling the sit-ins of the black civil rights movement. But the bar owner had been tipped off, and the bar was closed.

The trio next tried Howard Johnson's in the West Village and made its pronouncement to the manager: "We are homosexuals. It is against State Liquor Authority regulations to serve a homosexual. However we demand to be served." "So what?" the manager laughed—and to their dismay they were served the cocktails of their choice.

Finally, Julius's bar on West 10th Street refused service. According to Craig, the management there "had just as much to gain as we did by getting the regulation changed." A formal complaint was filed with the City Commission on Human Rights, then headed by William Booth. With the Commission backing the gays' challenge, the State Liquor Authority backed down and dropped the discriminatory regulation.

As early as 1966, when Craig was vice-president of New York Mattachine, he was "trying to get the Society to open up a street storefront. I was trying to get the Society to be out dealing with people instead of sitting in an office. We even looked at a few storefronts," he recalls. "I wanted the Society to set up a combination bookstore, counseling service, fund-raising headquarters, and office. The main thing was to be out on the street." But Craig felt intuitively that the Society wasn't about to move in this direction, so he resigned and pursued his dream alone.

By taking temporary jobs on Wall Street, then working 16 hours a day all summer at a gay resort on Fire Island, Craig saved enough in a year's time to open a bookstore. "I saved a little over a thousand dollars. I knew nothing about business of any kind, much less the book business. The cheapest store-front in the Village that I could find was \$115 a month, and they insisted on the first month's rent plus two months' security. That was \$345, or one third of the money I had saved. But I did it!"

Craig opened his Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop on Thanksgiving Day, 1967. His mother came in from Chicago to help him with his opening. "I took her right from the airport to the shop, and we stayed up all night putting up shelves, then opened up the



next day. That's not saying too much, because there were only about ten shelves to put up: ten shelves for about 25 titles, three copies of each!" In addition he featured lots of free or inexpensive movement publications and several gay slogan buttons. He also offered free coffee and cookies.

"Opening weekend, I sold out many of the better titles, which pleased me: That was the kind of shop I wanted to have!" He was referring to books such as *The Homosexual in America* by Donald Webster Cory, *Quatrefoil* by James Barr, and the renowned *Wolfenden Report* out of England. The next week he added Richard Amory's *Song of the Loon*, a book that "almost glamorizes homosexuality" and has always sold well, according to Craig. "I didn't even want to carry that book because it had 'dirty words' in it, I thought then. Because up until then, people thought of gay book shops as porno book shops. I wanted to have literature that presented homosexuality in a good light. The shop still isn't what I'd like."

Craig raps enthusiastically about the kind of gay bookstore he has tried to establish. "My general policy was to have a shop where gay people didn't feel they were being exploited either sexually or economically. People call me a puritan, and in a sense I have to agree with them. I don't mean I'm a puritan sexually—far from it. But the reason I'm against most of the highly sexual magazines, for example, is not the content particularly—although it's done rather leeringly—but the whole sexploitation angle. A ten-dollar price on something that makes sex look dirty and furtive.

"Even a book like David Reuben's *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex*, or the Wydens' *Growing Up Straight*, or Socarides's *The Overt Homosexual*—to me they're in the same class as the 42nd Street sexploitationers. All of them use sex, especially homosexuality, as a gimmick to play on guilts and fears and prejudices of people and exploit them.

"Shortly after I opened, I decided to carry gay erotic books as well, in order to survive economically. But generally I picked them. I excluded books with certain key words: third sex, twilight world,

perversion—nothing about that. I wanted to depict homosexuality as basically good.”

Craig’s shop differs from other so-called gay book stores in another important way: it looks like any ordinary book store, not like a porno shop with shades drawn. The sunlight comes into this bookshop. So do customers under twenty-one. So do women—about a fourth of the customers are women. There is no peep-show in the back. There are no “Adult Reading” signs in the window; instead it is adorned with a bumper sticker proclaiming “Gay Is Good!” Craig’s ad in the *Village Voice* reads, “GAY AND PROUD? Then you’re our kind of men and women!”

Also, Craig admits, the shop is “a propaganda outlet, really.” Gay organizations can give away or sell their literature there. It’s very movement-oriented, with materials from the most conservative to the most radical gay groups.

Craig sees a similar need for a gay bar that will be as different from the usual gay bar as his bookshop is from the traditional gay bookshop, “a bar which says in its atmosphere, its advertising, its management, its ambiance—we’re glad to have you, we’re one of you, we’re with you.” Such a bar, if successful, would be pressured by the syndicate, Craig feels, “but if it was up-front and closely connected with the gay movement, it could get by.” Craig is adamant in his view that gay people “should have indignation about the way they are exploited financially and health-wise” by gay bars.

During his first 18 months in business, Craig recalls, he manned the shop himself from noon to ten at night, seven days a week. Later, Craig had a lover with whom he lived for a year and a half, and they handled the business together and took turns tending the shop. For steady companionship in the store, they acquired a friendly Schnauzer, whom they called Albert. (Albert is gay, says Craig, and very promiscuous.)

Customers often remarked on the friendliness and coziness of the bookstore. Devotees brought candies and other items from abroad for the shop. The Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop became a miniature community gathering place, with gays stopping in on

even the coldest winter nights to chat and to scan notices on the bulletin board of gay events in the city.

“I found myself talking to people all day long, and I’m not that much of a social person,” Craig says. “Also, sitting in one spot gets you down after a while. But I’ve always tried to keep it a friendly, homey atmosphere where people could feel free to talk. And I’ve counseled many young people who are just coming out in gay life.

“Almost every day now there are students in from one class or another at New York University. Their professors tell them to stop by. Gay liberation topics are being increasingly assigned to students now.

“Then there’s the older man, usually with a trench coat on, who comes in, walks around, then comes up to the counter and says in a low voice, ‘What do you have under the counter?’ And many times it’s difficult persuading them there’s no hidden porno.”

Craig’s supply of fiction and non-fiction books from the major publishers has steadily increased from the 25 titles he had on opening day. These books in hardcover and paperback editions command the bulk of the space in the shop, whose interior was attractively redesigned by two gay women architects when the original layout became inadequate for the expanding stock. Craig says he has successfully resisted pressure by distributors to take heavy doses of heavy porno, with its very tempting price mark-up. One salesman couldn’t really believe that Craig was giving hot porn the cold shoulder. At last the man became livid, yelled “Cocksucker!” at Craig, and stormed out of the shop.

The stock in the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop breaks down about this way: 10 percent primarily for gay women, 70 percent for gay men, and 20 percent of equal interest to women and men. “This is admittedly disproportionate, but I don’t accept the blame for that,” says Craig. “There’s just a lot more published for gay men than for gay women. It’s part of male chauvinism in our society. Actually, publishers should be the target. Unfortunately, most books written about gay women are the trashy lesbian novels that straight men read. Even I didn’t realize that when I first opened the shop,

and I stocked such books until women friends told me that lesbians don't read them."

An example of a novel of genuine interest to lesbians is *A Place for Us* by Isabel Miller, and Craig's bookstore was the first to feature it. (*A Place for Us* was given the First Annual Gay Book Award, conferred by the Task Force on Gay Liberation at the American Library Association convention in Dallas in June 1971.)

For parents of young gays, Craig has certain books he proposes as recommended reading. In counseling, he says, "I tell gay people, 'Be firm with your family. *Insist* that they come to an understanding of you, that they read certain things, that they meet your friends. Insist that they love you as their son or daughter—which means that they know you!'"

Craig squared with his family about his gay orientation after he'd been in New York for over a year. "They're sort of the prototype of what we think of as Middle America, and they were prejudiced against everybody who didn't think like them. When I told them, they reacted negatively, out of fear and lack of knowledge of what it means. So I made them read articles and books. I had to be very firm about educating them," he says.

Harassment of the shop has taken the form of phone calls, hate letters, and even break-ins, with swastikas and "Kill Fags" left scrawled on the door. "One Christmas Eve," Craig recalls, "I had just flown home to Chicago and my mother met me at the airport, and she was in tears. She'd just gotten a call from New York that the shop was broken into and trashed, and I had to get on the next plane back."

The phone calls and letters usually consist of blunt sexual overtures ("I want a blow job") or threats of violence ("Cocksucking faggot, I hate you and I'm going to burn that shop down"). "I expected some of that, so it came as no surprise," Craig says. With the help of the telephone company, one caller who made several threats was actually apprehended.

Meanwhile, Craig has built up the business to the point where he can afford one part-time employee. He has time now to sip beer and watch baseball, to go to the beach, to participate in a consciousness-

raising group, to write a regular column for *QQ*, a gay men's magazine. And time for his favorite specialized movement activity, the Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee, which he helped found.

"I watched the Stonewall riot," Craig says, "and while I didn't participate in the violence, I think I was the first to chant 'Gay Power'!"

Shortly afterwards, Craig and three friends drew up a resolution, later passed by the Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations, that Christopher Street Liberation Day be celebrated the last Sunday in June each year in New York City, to commemorate the birth of the gay liberation movement as exemplified in the Stonewall riots. When the resolution was accepted, Craig became a founder of the coordinating committee that was to shape the annual celebration in New York.

Members of dozens of organizations, as well as gays with no group affiliation, made up the crowd estimated at from 5,000 to 10,000 that marched in Manhattan in 1970. But "the whole idea is to set aside the day for a show of unity, solidarity, and collective pride of gay people—and not to have the day's activities run by any one organization. So the coordinating committee keeps itself a rather quiet operation."

This quiet but critical operation holds Craig's continuing interest. "Here's the request for the parade permit for this year," he says, showing a long, detailed form. The estimated crowd for 1971: 50,000! "I think there might even be more gay people turning out than that, from what I've been hearing in the shop. Everybody's coming!"

About three dozen people work on the coordinating committee and will actually put this march together, Craig explains; and even though he hates rules and regulations, he is willing to be one of those contending with city bureaucracy in order to get the permit.

"Obviously, one day there will be a huge gay march on Washington," he predicts. Such marches, he feels, are important primarily because they change people's attitudes about homosexuality. "I don't really believe in law reform as a goal. . . .

First you have to change what people basically think of themselves.”  
Marches such as Christopher Street Liberation Day show the vast diversity of gays and help change the heads of both straight and gay people, Craig believes.

DURING STONEWALL

## DICK LEITSCH

*Activist and journalist Dick Leitsch was president of the New York Mattachine Society in the 1960s. He spearheaded their pioneering demonstrations, including the “sip-in” at a bar called Julius’ in 1966 to protest the New York State Liquor Authority’s then-effective policy outlawing the service of alcohol to out homosexuals. His eyewitness account of the Stonewall uprising was distributed hot off the presses, along with the New York Mattachine Newsletter, just after the riots.*

### “The Hairpin Drop Heard Around the World”

The first gay riots in history took place during the predawn hours of Saturday and Sunday, June 28–29, in New York’s Greenwich Village. The demonstrations were touched off by a police raid on the popular Stonewall Club, 53 Christopher Street. This was the last (to date) in a series of harassments which plagued the Village area for the last several weeks.

Plainclothes officers entered the club at about 2 a.m., armed with a warrant, and closed the place on grounds of illegal selling of alcohol. Employees were arrested and the customers told to leave. The patrons gathered on the street outside, and were joined by other Village residents and visitors to the area. The police behaved, as is usually the case when they deal with homosexuals, with bad grace, and were reproached by “straight” onlookers. Pennies were thrown at the cops by the crowd, then beer cans, rocks, and even parking meters. The cops retreated inside the bar, which was set afire by the crowd.

A hose from the bar was employed by the trapped cops to douse the flames, and reinforcements were summoned. A melee ensued, with nearly a thousand persons participating, as well as several



hundred cops. Nearly two hours later, the cops had “secured” the area.

The next day, the Stonewall management sent in a crew to repair the premises, and found that the cops had taken all the money from the cigarette machine, the jukebox, the cash register, and the safe, and had even robbed the waiters’ tips!

Since they had been charged with selling liquor without a license, the club was reopened as a “free store,” open to all and with everything being given away, rather than sold.

A crowd filled the place and the street in front. Singing and chanting filled Sheridan Square Park, and the crowds grew quickly.

At first, the crowd was all gay, but as the weekend tourists poured in the area, they joined the crowd. They’d begin by asking what was happening. When they were told that homosexuals were protesting the closing of a gay club, they’d become very sympathetic, and stay to watch or join in. One middle-aged lady with her husband told a cop that he should be ashamed of himself. “Don’t you know that these people have no place to go, and need places like that bar?” she shouted. (Several hours later, she and her husband, with two other couples, were seen running with a large group of homosexuals from the nightsticks brandished by the TPF.)

The crowds were orderly, and limited themselves to singing and shouting slogans such as “Gay Power,” “We Want Freedom Now,” and “Equality for homosexuals.” As the mob grew, it spilled off the sidewalk, overflowed Sheridan Square Park, and began to fill the roadway. One of the six cops who were there to keep order began to get smart and cause hostility. A bus driver blew his horn at the meeting, and someone shouted, “Stop the Bus!” The crowd surged out in to the street and blocked the progress of the bus. As the driver inched ahead, someone ripped off an advertising card and blocked the windshield with it. The crowd beat on the sides of the (empty) bus and shouted, “Christopher Street belongs to the queens!” and “Liberate the street.”

The cops got the crowd to let the bus pass, but then the people began a slow-down-the-traffic campaign. A human line across the street blocked traffic, and the cars were let through one at a time.

Another car, bearing a fat, gouty-looking cop with many pounds of gilt braid, chauffeured by a cute young cop, came through. The fat cop looked for all the world like a slave owner surveying the plantation, and someone tossed a sack of wet garbage through the car window and right on his face. The bag broke and soggy coffee grounds dripped down the lined face, which never lost its “screw you” look.

Another police car came through Waverly Place, and stopped at the corner of Christopher. The occupants just sat there and glared at the crowd. Suddenly, a concrete block landed on the hood of the car, and the crowd drew back. Then, as one person, it surged forward and surrounded the car, beating on it with fists and dancing atop it. The cops radioed for help, and soon the crowd let the car pass.

Christopher Street, from Greenwich to Seventh Avenues, had become an almost solid mass of people—most of them gay. No traffic could pass, and even walking the few blocks on foot was next to impossible. One little old lady tried to get through, and many members of the crowd tried to help her. She brushed them away and continued her determined walk, trembling with fear and murmuring, “It must be the full moon, it must be the full moon.”

Squad cars from the Fifth, Sixth, Fourth, and Ninth Precincts had brought in a hundred or so cops, who had no hope of controlling the crowd of nearly two thousand people in the streets. Until this point, the crowd had been, for the most part, pleasant and in a jovial mood. Some of the cops began to become very nasty, and started trouble. One boy, evidently a discus thrower, reacted by bouncing garbage can lids neatly off the helmets of the cops. Others set garbage cans ablaze. A Christopher Street merchant stood in the doorway of her shop and yelled at the cops to behave themselves. Whenever they would head in her direction, she’d run into the shop and lock the door.

The focus of the demonstration shifted from the Stonewall to “The Corner”—Greenwich Avenue and Christopher Street. The intersection, and the street behind it, was a solid mass of humanity. The Tactical Police Force (TPF) arrived in city buses. 100 of them

debarked at The Corner, and 50 more at Seventh Ave. and Christopher.

They huddled with some of the top brass that had already arrived, and isolated beer cans, thrown by the crowd, hit their vans and cars now and again. Suddenly, two cops darted into the crowd and dragged out a boy who had done absolutely nothing. As they carried him to a waiting van brought to take off prisoners, four more cops joined them and began pounding the boy in the face, belly, and groin with night sticks. A high shrill voice called out, "Save our sister!" and there was a general pause, during which the "butch" looking "numbers" looked distracted. Momentarily, fifty or more homosexuals who would have to be described as "nelly," rushed the cops and took the boy back into the crowd. They then formed a solid front and refused to let the cops into the crowd to regain their prisoner, letting the cops hit them with their sticks rather than let them through.

(It was an interesting sidelight on the demonstrations that those usually put down as "sissies" or "swishes" showed the most courage and sense during the action. Their bravery and daring saved many people from being hurt, and their sense of humour and camp helped keep the crowds from getting nasty or too violent.)

The cops gave up on the idea of taking prisoners, and concentrated on clearing the area. They rushed both ways on Greenwich, forcing the crowds into 10th Street and 6th Avenue, where the people circled the blocks and reentered Christopher. Then the cops formed a flying wedge, and with arms linked, headed down Greenwich, forcing everyone in front of them into side streets. Cops on the ends of the wedge broke off and chased demonstrators down the side streets and away from the center of the action.

They made full use of their night sticks, brandishing them like swords. At one point a cop grabbed a wild Puerto Rican queen and lifted his arm to bring a club down on "her." In his best Mario Montez voice, the queen challenged, "How'd you like a big Spanish dick up your little Irish ass?" The cop was so shocked he hesitated in his swing and the queen escaped.

At another point, two lonely cops were chasing a hundred or more people down Waverly Place. Someone shouted out that the queens outnumbered the cops and suggested catching them, ripping off their clothes, and screwing them. The cops abandoned the chase and fled back to the main force for protection.

The police action did eventually disperse the crowds, many of whom abandoned the cause and headed to the docks for some fun. By 2:30, nearly two hours after the bus had been delayed, the area was again peaceful. Apart from the two to three hundred cops standing around the area, it looked like an unusually dull Saturday night.

Then, at 3 a.m. the bars closed, and the patrons of the many gay bars in the area arrived to see what was happening. They were organized and another attempt was made to liberate Christopher Street. The police, still there in great numbers, managed to break up the demonstrations. One small group did break off and attempt to liberate the IND subway station at Sixth Avenue and Waverly Place, but the police, after a hurried consultation as to whether they could act on the “turf” of the Transit cops, went in and chased everyone out.

By 5:30 a.m., the area was secure enough that the TPF police were sent home, and the docks were packed tight with homosexuals having the times of their lives. After all, everything was perfectly “safe”—all the cops were on “The Corner”!

In all, thirteen people were arrested on Saturday morning—7 of them employees of the Stonewall. Four more were arrested on Sunday morning, and many more were detained then released. Apparently, only four persons were injured . . . all of them cops. Three suffered minor bruises and scratches, and one a “broken wrist” (it was not specified whether it was the kind of “broken wrist” that requires a cast, or the kind that makes it noisy to wear a bangle bracelet . . . we presume it was the former).

Sunday night saw a lot of action in the Christopher Street area. Hundreds of people were on the streets, including, for the first time, a large leather contingent. However, there were never enough

people to outnumber the large squads of cops milling about, trying desperately to head off any trouble.

The Stonewall was again a “free store” and the citizenry was treated to the sight of the cops begging homosexuals to go inside the bar that they had chased everyone out of a few nights before.

Inasmuch as all the cops in town seemed to be near The Corner again, the docks were very busy, and two boys went to the Charles Street station house and pasted “Equality for Homosexuals” bumper stickers on cop cars, the autos of on-duty cops, and the van used to take away prisoners.

One of the most frightening comments was made by one cop to another, and overheard by a MSNY member being held in detention. One said he’d enjoyed the fracas. “Them queers have a good sense of humor and really had a good time,” he said. His “buddy” protested “aw, they’re sick. I like nigger riots better because there’s more action, but you can’t beat up a fairy. They ain’t mean like blacks; they’re sick. But you can’t hit a sick man.”

## THOMAS LANIGAN-SCHMIDT

*Artist Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt is a veteran of the Stonewall uprising. He participated in the downtown performance scenes with Jack Smith and Charles Ludlam and is on the faculty of the School of Visual Arts. The text of his piece “1969 Mother Stonewall and the Golden Rats” describes how he became one of the queens at the Stonewall and the violence of the police raid.*

### “1969 Mother Stonewall and the Golden Rats”

We sat on the curb gutter around the corner from a dance bar called the Stonewall. He had wounds sutured up and down his arms. The army had rejected him for being “a queer.” His father had thrown him out of the house through a glass door. I’d left home for the last time too. I was supposed to be on a ditch-digging, road-repair summer job crew with a bunch of jerks I’d gone to school with (they would’ve buried me alive, just for the fun of it). So, I up and went to New York City with just the clothes on my back. One queen had an enormous burn scar covering her face and most of her body. Her mother didn’t want men to be “tempted” by her son’s beauty. We lived in cheap hotels, broken down apartments, abandoned buildings, or on the streets. Home was where the heart is. Some were able to get menial jobs. Some of us were on welfare. Some of us hustled. And some of us panhandled (begged for money in the streets). Food was where you found it. Many of us had gotten thrown out of home before finishing high school. WE WERE STREET RATS. Puerto Rican, black, northern and southern whites, “Debby the Dyke” and a Chinese queen named “Jade East.” The sons and daughters of postal workers, welfare mothers, cab drivers, mechanics, and nurse’s aides (just to name a few). Until properly

introduced it was de rigueur argot to call everybody “Miss Thing,” (after this, it was discretionary usage). I strongly objected when a queen called “Opera Jean” called me “Mary” (but I’m a man!?) “Mary, Grace, Alice, what’s the difference. After all, we’re all sisters? Aren’t we?” (one in essence and undivided). She was head-strong, so I stopped complaining. I ended up being named “Violet” by a black queen named “Nova.”

WE ALL ENDED UP TOGETHER AT A PLACE CALLED THE STONEWALL. Safe and sound. All you had to do was find an empty beer can, so the waiter would think you’d bought a drink, and the night was yours. A replica of a wishing well stood near the back bar of one of the two large rooms painted black. The jukebox played a lot of Motown music. We DANCED. The air conditioners seemed not to work at all because the place was always so crowded. We were happy. This place was the “ART” that gave form to the feelings of our heartbeats. Here the consciousness of knowing you “belonged” nestled into that warm feeling of finally being HOME. And Home engenders love and loyalty quite naturally. So, we loved the Stonewall.

The cops (singular and plural) were generically known as “Lily Law,” “Betty Badge,” “Patty Pig” or “The Devil with the Blue Dress On.” That night Betty Badge got carried away. It was not only a raid but a bust. Mother Stonewall was being violated. They forcibly entered her with nightsticks. The lights went on. It wasn’t a pretty sight. (How would children feel seeing their mother raped right before their eyes? Their home broken into and looted!? The music box broken. The dancing stopped. The replicated wishing well smashed?). No, this wasn’t a 1960s student riot. Out there were the streets. There were no nice dorms for sleeping. No school cafeteria for certain food. No affluent parents to send us checks. There was a ghetto riot on home turf. We already had our war wounds. So this was just another battle. Nobody thought of it as history, herstory, my-story, your-story, or our-story. We were being denied a place to dance together. That’s all. The total charisma of a revolution in our CONSCIOUSNESS rising from the gutter to the gut to the heart and the mind was here. Non-existence (or part existence) was coming

into being, and being into becoming. Our Mother Stonewall was giving birth to a new era and we were the midwives.

THAT NIGHT the “Gutter (Street) Rats” shone like the brightest gold! And like that baby born in a feed trough (a manger) or found by Pharaoh’s daughter in a basket floating down the river Nile, the mystery of history happened again in the least likely of places.



## HOWARD SMITH

*Journalist and director Howard Smith covered the New York scene for the Village Voice in the 1960s and '70s. He was shadowing the police during the late-Friday raid of the Stonewall and was the only reporter inside the bar during the rioting. His account was published as "View from Inside" in the July 3, 1969, issue of the Village Voice.*

### "View from Inside: Full Moon over the Stonewall"

During the "gay power" riots at the Stonewall last Friday night I found myself on what seemed to me the wrong side of the blue line. Very scary. Very enlightening.

I had struck up a spontaneous relationship with Deputy Inspector Pine, who had marshaled the raid, and was following him closely, listening to all the little dialogues and plans and police inflections. Things were already pretty tense: the gay customers freshly ejected from their hangout, prancing high and jubilant in the street, had been joined by quantities of Friday night tourists hawking around for Village-type excitement. The cops had considerable trouble arresting the few people they wanted to take in for further questioning. A strange mood was in the crowd—I noticed the full moon. Loud defiances mixed with skittish hilarity made for a more dangerous stage of protest; they were feeling their impunity. This kind of crowd freaks easily.

The turning point came when the police had difficulty keeping a dyke in a patrol car. Three times she slid out and tried to walk away. The last time a cop bodily heaved her in. The crowd shrieked, "Police brutality!" "Pigs!" A few coins sailed through the air. I

covered my face. Pine ordered the three cars and paddy wagon to leave with the prisoners before the crowd became more of a mob. "Hurry back," he added, realizing he and his force of eight detectives, two of them women, would be easily overwhelmed if the temper broke. "Just drop them at the Sixth Precinct and hurry back."

The sirened caravan pushed through the gauntlet, pummeled and buffeted until it managed to escape. "Pigs!" "Gaggot cops!" Pennies and dimes flew. I stood against the door. The detectives held at most a 10-foot clearing. Escalate to nickels and quarters. A bottle. Another bottle. Pine says, "Let's get inside. Lock ourselves inside, it's safer."

"You want to come in?" he asks me. "You're probably safer," with a paternal tone. Two flashes: if they go in and I stay out, will the mob know that the blue plastic thing hanging from my shirt is a press card, or by now will they assume I'm a cop too? On the other hand, it might be interesting to be locked in with a few cops, just rapping and reviewing how they work.

In goes me. We bolt the heavy door. The front of the Stonewall is mostly brick except for the windows, which are boarded within by plywood. Inside we hear the shattering of windows, followed by what we imagine to be bricks pounding on the door, voices yelling. The floor shudders at each blow. "Aren't you guys scared?" I say.

"No." But they look at least uneasy.

The door crashes open, beer cans and bottles hurtle in. Pine and his troop rush to shut it. At that point the only uniformed cop among them gets hit with something under his eye. He hollers, and his hand comes away scarlet. It looks a lot more serious than it really is. They are all suddenly furious. Three run out in front to see if they can scare the mob from the door. A hail of coins. A beer can glances off Deputy Inspector Smyth's head.

Pine, a man of about 40 and smallish build, gathers himself, leaps out into the melee, and grabs someone around the waist, pulling him downward and back into the doorway. They fall. Pine regains hold and drags the elected protester inside by the hair. The door slams again. Angry cops converge on the guy, releasing their anger

on this sample from the mob. Pine is saying, "I saw him throwing somethin'," and the guy, unfortunately giving some sass, snidely admits to throwing "only a few coins." The cop who was cut is incensed, yells something like, "So you're the one who hit me!" And while the other cops help, he slaps the prisoner five or six times very hard and finishes with a punch to the mouth. They handcuff the guy as he almost passes out. "All right," Pine announces, "we book him for assault." The door is smashed open again. More objects are thrown in. The detectives locate a fire hose, the idea being to ward off the madding crowd until reinforcements arrive. They can't see where to aim it, wedging the hose in a crack in the door. It sends out a weak stream. We all start to slip on water and Pine says to stop.

By now the mind's eye has forgotten the character of the mob; the sound filtering in doesn't suggest dancing faggots anymore. It sounds like a powerful rage bent on vendetta. That was why Pine's singling out of the guy I knew later to be Dave Van Ronk was important. The little force of detectives was beginning to feel fear, and Pine's action clinched their morale again.

A door over to the side almost gives. One cop shouts, "Get away from there or I'll shoot!" It stops shaking. The front door is completely open. One of the big plywood windows gives, and it seems inevitable that the mob will pour in. A kind of tribal adrenaline rush bolsters all of us; they all take out and check pistols. I see both policewomen busy doing the same, and the danger becomes even more real. I find a big wrench behind the bar, jam it into my belt like a scimitar. Hindsight: my fear on the verge of being trampled by a mob fills the same dimensions as my fear on the verge of being clubbed by the TPF.

Pine places a few men on each side of the corridor leading away from the entrance. They aim unwavering at the door. One detective arms himself in addition with a sawed-off baseball bat he has found. I hear, "We'll shoot the first motherfucker that comes through the door."

Pine glances over toward me. "Are you all right, Howard?" I can't believe what I am saying: "I'd feel a lot better with a gun."

I can only see the arm at the window. It squirts a liquid into the room, and a flaring match follows. Pine is not more than 10 feet away. He aims his gun at the figures.

He doesn't fire. The sound of sirens coincides with the whoosh of flames where the lighter fluid was thrown. Later, Pine tells me he didn't shoot because he had heard the sirens in time and felt no need to kill someone if help was arriving. It was that close.

While the squads of uniforms disperse the mob out front, inside we are checking to see if each of us is all right. For a few minutes we get the post-tension giggles, but as they subside I start scribbling notes to catch up, and the people around me change back to cops. They begin examining the place.

It had lasted 45 minutes. Just before and after the siege I picked up some more detached information. According to the police, they are not picking on homosexuals. On these raids they almost never arrest customers, only people working there. As of June 1, the State Liquor Authority said that all unlicensed places were eligible to apply for licenses. The police are scrutinizing all unlicensed places, and most of the bars that are in that category happen to cater to homosexuals. The Stonewall is an unlicensed private club. The raid was made with a warrant, after undercover agents inside observed illegal sale of alcohol. To make certain the raid plans did not leak, it was made without notifying the Sixth Precinct until after the detectives (all from the First Division) were inside the premises. Once the bust had actually started, one of Pine's men called the Sixth for assistance on a pay phone.

It was explained to me that generally men dressed as men, even if wearing extensive makeup, are always released; men dressed as women are sometimes arrested; and "men" fully dressed as women, but who upon inspection by a policewoman prove to have undergone the sex-change operation, are always let go. At the Stonewall, out of five queens checked, three were men and two were changes, even though all said they were girls. Pine released them all anyway.

As for the rough-talking owners and managers of the Stonewall, their riff ran something like this: we are just honest businessmen

who are being harassed by the police because we cater to homosexuals, and because our names are Italian so they think we are part of something bigger. We haven't done anything wrong and have never been convicted in no court. We have rights, and the courts should decide and not let the police do things like what happened here. When we got back in the place, all the mirrors, jukeboxes, phones, toilets, and cigarette machines were smashed. Even the sinks were stuffed and running over. And we say the police did it. The courts will say that we are innocent.

Who isn't, I thought, as I dropped my scimitar and departed.

## LUCIAN TRUSCOTT IV

*Novelist and journalist Lucian Truscott IV was on the streets outside the Stonewall during the initial raid, and followed the protests and resistance on the streets for the rest of the weekend. His account was published as “View from Outside” in the July 3, 1969, issue of the Village Voice, which covered the uprising.*

### “View from Outside: Gay Power Comes to Sheridan Square”

Sheridan Square this weekend looked like something from a William Burroughs novel as the sudden specter of “gay power” erected its brazen head and spat out a fairy tale the likes of which the area has never seen.

The forces of faggotry, spurred by a Friday night raid on one of the city’s largest, most popular, and longest-lived gay bars, the Stonewall Inn, rallied Saturday night in an unprecedented protest against the raid and continued Sunday night to assert presence, possibility, and pride until the early hours of Monday morning. “I’m a faggot, and I’m proud of it!” “Gay Power!” “I like boys!”—these and many other slogans were heard all three nights as the show of force by the city’s finery met the force of the city’s finest. The result was a kind of liberation, as the gay brigade emerged from the bars, back rooms, and bedrooms of the Village and became street people.



Cops entered the Stonewall for the second time in a week just before midnight on Friday. It began as a small raid—only two patrolmen, two detectives, and two policewomen were involved. But

as the patrons trapped inside were released one by one, a crowd started to gather on the street. It was initially a festive gathering, composed mostly of Stonewall boys who were waiting around for friends still inside or to see what was going to happen. Cheers would go up as favorites would emerge from the door, strike a pose, and swish by the detective with a “Hello there, fella.” The stars were in their element. Wrists were limp, hair was primped, and reactions to the applause were classic. “I gave them the gay power bit, and they loved it, girls.” “Have you seen Maxine? Where is my wife—I told her not to go far.”

Suddenly the paddy wagon arrived and the mood of the crowd changed. Three of the more blatant queens—in full drag—were loaded inside, along with the bartender and doorman, to a chorus of catcalls and boos from the crowd. A cry went up to push the paddy wagon over, but it drove away before anything could happen. With its exit, the action waned momentarily. The next person to come out was a dyke, and she put up a struggle—from car to door to car again. It was at that moment that the scene became explosive. Limp wrists were forgotten. Beer cans and bottles were heaved at the windows, and a rain of coins descended on the cops. At the height of the action, a bearded figure was plucked from the crowd and dragged inside. It was Dave Van Ronk, who had come from the Lion’s Head to see what was going on. He was later charged with having thrown an object at the police.

Three cops were necessary to get Van Ronk away from the crowd and into the Stonewall. The exit left no cops on the street, and almost by signal the crowd erupted into cobblestone and bottle heaving. The reaction was solid: they were pissed. The trashcan I was standing on was nearly yanked out from under me as a kid tried to grab it for use in the window-smashing melee. From nowhere came an uprooted parking meter—used as a battering ram on the Stonewall door. I heard several cries of “Let’s get some gas,” but the blaze of flame which soon appeared in the window of the Stonewall was still a shock. As the wood barrier behind the glass was beaten open, the cops inside turned a fire hose on the crowd. Several kids took the opportunity to cavort in the spray, and their momentary

glee served to stave off what was rapidly becoming a full-scale attack. By the time the fags were able to regroup forces and come up with another assault, several carloads of police reinforcements had arrived, and in minutes the streets were clear.

A visit to the Sixth Precinct revealed the fact that 13 persons had been arrested on charges which ranged from Van Ronk's felonious assault of a police officer to the owners' illegal sale and storage of alcoholic beverages without a license. Two police officers had been injured in the battle with the crowd. By the time the last cop was off the street Saturday morning, a sign was going up announcing that the Stonewall would reopen that night. It did.

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Protest set the tone for "gay power" activities on Saturday. The afternoon was spent boarding up the windows of the Stonewall and chalking them with signs of the new revolution: "We are Open," "There is all college boys and girls in here," "Support Gay Power—C'mon in, girls," "Insp. Smyth looted our: money, jukebox, cigarette mach, telephones, safe, cash register, and the boys tips." Among the slogans were two carefully clipped and bordered copies of the *Daily News* story about the previous night's events, which was anything but kind to the gay cause.

The real action Saturday was that night in the street. Friday night's crowd had returned and was being led in "gay power" cheers by a group of gay cheerleaders. "We are the Stonewall girls / We wear our hair in curls / We have no underwear / We show our pubic hairs!" The crowd was gathered across the street from the Stonewall and was growing with additions of onlookers, Eastsiders, and rough street people who saw a chance for a little action. Though dress had changed from Friday night's gayery to Saturday night street clothes, the scene was a command performance for queers. If Friday night had been pickup night, Saturday was date night. Hand-holding, kissing, and posing accented each of the cheers with a homosexual liberation that had appeared only fleetingly on the street before. One-liners were as practiced as if they had been used for years. "I



just want you all to know,” quipped a platinum blond with obvious glee, “that sometimes being homosexual is a big pain in the ass.” Another allowed as how he had become a “left-deviationist.” And on and on.

The quasi-political tone of the street scene was looked upon with disdain by some, for radio news announcements about the previous night’s “gay power” chaos had brought half of Fire Island’s Cherry Grove running back to home base to see what they had left behind. The generation gap existed even here. Older boys had strained looks on their faces and talked in concerned whispers as they watched the up-and-coming generation take being gay and flaunt it before the masses.

As the “gay power” chants on the street rose in frequency and volume, the crowd grew restless. The front of the Stonewall was losing its attraction, despite efforts by the owners to talk the crowd back into the club. “C’mon in and see what da pigs done to us,” they growled. “We’re honest businessmen here. We’re American-born boys. We run a legitimate joint here. There ain’t nuttin’ bein’ done wrong in dis place. Everybody come and see.”

The people on the street were not to be coerced. “Let’s go down the street and see what’s happening, girls,” someone yelled. And down the street went the crowd, smack into the Tactical Patrol Force, who had been called earlier to disperse the crowd and were walking west on Christopher from Sixth Avenue. Formed in a line, the TPF swept the crowd back to the corner of Waverly Place, where they stopped. A stagnant situation there brought on some gay tomfoolery in the form of a chorus line facing the line of helmeted and club-carrying cops. Just as the line got into a full kick routine, the TPF advanced again and cleared the crowd of screaming gay powerites down Christopher to Seventh Avenue. The street and park were then held from both ends, and no one was allowed to enter—naturally causing a fall-off in normal Saturday night business, even at the straight Lion’s Head and 55. The TPF positions in and around the square were held with only minor incident—one busted head and a number of scattered arrests—while the cops amused themselves by arbitrarily breaking up small groups of people up and

down the avenue. The crowd finally dispensed around 3:30 a.m. The TPF had come and they had conquered, but Sunday was already there, and it was to be another story.

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Sunday night was a time for watching and rapping, Gone were the “gay power” chants of Saturday, but not the new and open brand of exhibitionism. Steps, curbs, and the park provided props for what amounted to the Sunday fag follies as returning stars from the previous night’s performances stopped by to close the show for the weekend.

It was slow going. Around 1 a.m. a non-helmeted version of the TPF arrived and made a controlled and very cool sweep of the area, getting everyone moving and out of the park. That put a damper on posing and primping, and as the last buses were leaving Jerseyward, the crowd grew thin. Allen Ginsberg and Taylor Mead walked by to see what was happening and were filled in on the previous evenings’ activities by some of the gay activists. “Gay power! Isn’t that great!” Allen said. “We’re one of the largest minorities in the country—10 per cent, you know. It’s about time we did something to express ourselves.”

Ginsberg expressed a desire to visit the Stonewall—“You know, I’ve never been in there”—and ambled on down the street, flashing peace signs and helloing the TPF. It was a relief and a kind of joy to see him on the street. He lent an extra umbrella of serenity of the scene with his laughter and quiet commentary on consciousness, “gay power” as a new movement, and the various implications of what had happened. I followed him into the Stonewall, where rock music blared from speakers all around a room that might have come right from a Hollywood set of a gay bar. He was immediately bouncing and dancing wherever he moved.

He left, and I walked east with him. Along the way, he described how things used to be. “You know, the guys there were so beautiful—they’ve lost that wounded look that fags all had 10 years ago.” It was the first time I had heard that crowd described as beautiful.

We reached Cooper Square, and as Ginsberg turned to head toward home, he waved and yelled, “Defend the fairies!” and bounced on across the square. He enjoyed the prospect of “gay power” and is probably working on a manifesto for the movement right now. Watch out. The liberation is under way.

## MARK SEGAL

*Activist and journalist Mark Segal founded the activist group Gay Youth in 1969 and the newspaper Philadelphia Gay News in 1976. In this passage from his memoir, And Then I Danced, he describes the Stonewall uprising and the activism that arose in the wake of the riots, and provides the greater context of the other LGBTQ riots that took place in the 1960s before Stonewall.*

### *From And Then I Danced*

My parents had given me a nine-inch portable black-and-white television set for my bar mitzvah. It was all the rage back then, an itty-bitty set with big round batteries. The David Susskind show came on late at night and I remember taking my TV up to my room, making my bedcovers into a tent, and watching the show. There was a man from the Mattachine Society in New York talking about gay people. I thought to myself, *There are homosexuals in New York. There are people like me.* Then and there I knew I would move to New York.

It was a while before I took action, but that night a plan began to form in my head. I was going to be with people like me. For a long while I had no idea how I'd do it, but it eventually came to me. Radio Corporation of America (RCA) had a technical institute that taught high school students how to be television cameramen. That was my ticket. It broke my father's heart because he really wanted me to go to college, and Mom always said I'd make a great lawyer. But the only thing that mattered to me then was to be with my own kind and there were none of us in Philadelphia, at least none that I knew. In New York I would become part of a new breed of gay men

who didn't slide easily into the popular and unfortunate stereotypes of the times—and that would work to my advantage.

On May 10, 1969, the day after grades were finalized, I moved to New York on the pretense that I would start technical school in September. My parents drove me up, dropped me off, and I got a room at the YMCA. I dressed up in my best clothes and set off for a gay evening, probably expecting that my gay brothers and sisters would line up to embrace me and welcome me into their community. The problem was, I had no idea where to go. There were certainly no neon signs pointing to the gay area. It seemed the place to start my search was Greenwich Village, which according to the network news was the countercultural hub of the 1960s. Getting off the subway in the Village, I had an unhappy, lonely feeling. Leaving the security of home, finding myself in a strange place with no prospects of a job and little money, was a bit daunting. Yet my search was on. It didn't begin very well, though, and that first night I returned to my tiny four-dollar sweatbox room, exhausted and unsuccessful in finding my people.

After a few days of looking around, I came across a Village dance bar, the Stonewall, a mob-owned dive. The search was over. As it turned out, two boys I'd met at the YMCA from Saint Cloud, Minnesota, were there that night as well.

That first week, remembering the Susskind show with real live homosexuals, I also looked up *Mattachine Society* in the telephone book and went to their office. I had no idea what to expect. All I knew about them from the television show was that they worked on keeping gay people from getting fired. I walked out of the office about fifteen minutes later with a guy named Marty Robinson, who would later become one of the most unsung heroes of the gay movement. Marty was young and evidently frustrated in his dealings with Mattachine. He said, "You don't want to be involved with these old people. They don't understand gay rights as it's happening today. Look what's happening in the black community. Look at the fight for women's rights. Look at the fight against the Vietnam War."

It was 1969 and Mattachine had become old. They were men in suits. We were men in jeans and T-shirts. So he told me that he and others were going to start a new gay rights movement, one more in tune with the times. Marty was creating an organization called the Action Group and I became an inaugural member. We didn't know exactly what we were going to do or what actions we might pursue, but none of that mattered. Others at that time were also creating gay groups to spark public consciousness, similar to the groups feminists were establishing. It deserves to be said right here and right now that the feminist movement was pivotal in helping to shape the new movement for gay rights.

Groups across New York worked independently of each other, but all with the same goal of defining ourselves rather than accepting the labels that society had branded us with. We were on the ground floor of the struggle for equality, and though some might have seen it as a sexual revolution, we saw it as defining ourselves. Years later a friend would remark, "Mark was so involved with the sexual revolution that he didn't have time to participate." The Action Group would hold meetings walking down Christopher Street—our outdoor office, so to speak. We didn't have a headquarters.

Then, just a little over a month after I arrived, on June 28, 1969, Stonewall happened.

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Many in the LGBT community think of the Stonewall vets, as some call us, like heroes. For me it started out as a frightening event.

I was in the back of the bar near the dance floor, where the younger people usually hung out. The lights in the room blinked—a signal that there would be a raid—then turned all the way up. Stonewall was filled that night with the usual clientele: drag queens, hustlers, older men who liked younger guys, and stragglers like me—the boy next door who didn't know what he was searching for and felt he had little to offer. That all changed when the police raided the bar. As they always did, they walked in like they owned the place, cocky, assured that they could do and say whatever they

wanted and push people around with impunity. We had no idea why they came in, whether or not they'd been paid, wanted more payoffs, or simply wanted to harass the fags that night. One of the policemen came up to me and asked for my ID. I was eighteen, which was the legal drinking age in New York in those days. I rustled through my wallet, very frightened, and quickly handed him my ID. I was no help in their search for underage drinkers. I was relieved to be among the first to get out of the bar.

As a crowd began to assemble, I ran into Marty Robinson and he asked what was going on.

"It's just another raid," I told him, full of nonchalant sophistication. We walked up and down Christopher Street, and fifteen minutes later we heard loud banging and screaming. The screams were not of fear, but resistance. That was the beginning of the Stonewall riots. It was not the biggest riot ever—it has been tremendously blown out of proportion—but it was still a riot, although one pretty much contained to across the street on Sheridan Square and Seventh Avenue. There were probably only a couple hundred participants; anyone with a decent job or family ran away from that bar as fast as they could to avoid being arrested. Those who remained were the drag queens, hustlers, and runaways.

People had begun to congregate at the door after they left the bar. One of the cops had said something derogatory under his breath and the mood shifted. The crowd began taunting the police. Every time someone came out of the bar, the crowd yelled. A drag queen shouted at the cops: "What's the matter, aren't you getting any at home? I can give you something you'd really love." The cops started to get rough, pushing and shoving. In response the crowd got angry. The cops took refuge inside. The drag queens, loud and boisterous, were throwing everything that wasn't fastened down to the street and a few things that were, like parking meters. Whoever assumes that a swishy queen can't fight should have seen them, makeup dripping and gowns askew, fighting for their home and fiercely proving that no one would take it away from them.

More and more police cars arrived. Some rioters began fire-bombing the place while others fanned out, breaking shop windows

on Christopher Street and looting the displays; somebody put a dress on the statue of General Phil Sheridan. There was an odd, celebratory feel to it, the notion that we were finally fighting back and that it felt good. Bodies ricocheted off one another, but there was no fighting in the street. All the anger was directed at the policemen inside the bar. People were actually laughing and dancing out there. According to some accounts, though I did not actually see this, drag queens formed a Rockettes-style chorus line singing, “*We are the Stonewall girls / We wear our hair in curls / We wear no underwear / To show our pubic hair.*” That song and dance later became popular with a gay youth group I was part of, and months after Stonewall, Mark Horn, Jeff Hochhauser, Michael Knowles, Tony Russomanno, and I would dance our way to the Silver Dollar restaurant at the bottom of Christopher Street. We were going to be the first graduating class of gay activists in this country—indeed, most of us are still involved, and we’re in touch with each other to this day.

Marty Robinson, after seeing what was happening, disappeared and then reappeared with chalk. Most people don’t realize that Stonewall was not simply a one-night occurrence. Marty immediately understood that the Stonewall raid presented a “moment” that could be the catalyst to organize the movement and bring together all the separate groups. He was the one person who saw it then and there as a pivotal point in history. At his direction several of us wrote on walls and on the ground up and down Christopher Street: *Meet at Stonewall tomorrow night*. How did Marty know that this night could create something that would change our community forever?

The nights following the Stonewall raid consisted primarily of loosely organized speeches. Various LGBT factions were coming together publicly for the first time, protesting the oppressive treatment of the community. Up until that moment, LGBT people had simply accepted oppression and inequality as their lot in life. That all changed. There was a spirit of rebellion in the air. More than just merely begging to be treated equally, it was time to stand up, stand out, and demand an end to fearful deference.



Stonewall would become a four-night event and the most visible symbol of a movement. We united for the first time: lesbian separatists, gay men in fairy communes, people who had been part of other civil rights movements but never thought about one of their own, young gay radicals, hustlers, drag queens, and many like me who knew there was something out there for us, but didn't know what it was. It found us. So, to the NYPD, thank you. Thank you for creating a unified LGBT community and thank you for becoming the focal point for years of oppression that many of us had to suffer growing up. You represented all those groups and individuals that wanted to keep us in our place.

The Action Group eventually joined with other organizations to become the Gay Liberation Front, or GLF. In that first year Marty helped create the new gay movement, along with people like Martha Shelley, Allen Young, Karla Jay, Jim Fouratt, Barbara Love, John O'Brien, Lois Hart, Ralph Hall, Jim Owles, Perry Brass, Bob Kohler, Susan Silverman, Jerry Hoose, Steven Dansky, John Lauritsen, Dan Smith, Ron Auerbacher, Nikos Diaman, Suzanne Bevier, Carl Miller, Earl Galvin, Michael Brown, Arthur Evans, and of course Sylvia Rivera.

I'd like to believe that the GLF put us gay youth in a good position to succeed, since many of us have done so in different ways. Mark Horn has had an incredible career in advertising and public relations at top firms; Jeff Hochhauser went on to his dream of becoming a playwright and teaching theater; Michael Knowles is in theater management; and Tony Russomanno, who for a while in those early days was my partner, continued on his path in broadcasting, winning multiple Emmy and Peabody awards as a news reporter and television anchor.



Over the last few years, LGBT history has become a passion of mine, and sometimes it seems that the younger generation doesn't really care about it. The Gay Liberation Front has mostly been ignored in

the history books, even though it helped forge the foundation upon which our community is built.

Stonewall was a fire in the belly of the equality movement. Even so, accounts of it are full of myth and misinformation, and much of that will inevitably remain so, since there are differing accounts from those active in the movement. That's the nature of memory, I suppose. Regardless of the diverging stories, and no matter how intense the fighting was, Stonewall represented, absolutely, the first time that the LGBT community successfully fought back and forged an organized movement and community. All of us at Stonewall had one thing in common: the oppression of growing up in a world which demanded our silence about who we were and insisted that we simply accept the punishment that society levied for our choices. That silence ended with Stonewall, and those who created the Gay Liberation Front organized and launched a sustainable movement.

But Stonewall was not the first uprising. LGBT history is written, like most history, by the victors, those with the means and those with connections or power. Two similar uprisings before Stonewall have almost been written out of our history: San Francisco's Compton Cafeteria riot in 1966 and the Dewey's sit-in in Philadelphia in 1965. Drag queens and street kids who played a huge role in both events never documented those riots, thus they have been widely eliminated by the white upper middle class, many of whom were ashamed of those elements of our community. But Stonewall, Compton, and Dewey's all have one thing in common: drag queens and street kids. For some historians, drag queens are not the ideal representatives of the LGBT community. Oppression within oppression was and is still of concern. Even recently, with the transgender issue finally being taken seriously, there is still a backlash from the community about including them in the general gay movement.

It has been over forty years since the Gay Liberation Front first took trans seriously, but the gay men who wore those shirts with the polo players or alligator emblems didn't want trans people as the representation of their community. Their revisionist history has been accepted into popular culture because they were the ones with

connections to publishers, the influence, as well as the money and time to sit back and write about what “really” happened.

The riot of 1966 in San Francisco grew out of police harassment of drag queens at Compton’s Cafeteria. It all started with the staff at Compton’s telling the drag queens to settle down. It was the drag queens who, night after night, went there and bought drinks, sustaining the business. It was, in a sense, their home. The management’s job, according to their deal with the police, was to keep the queens in order. One night, like Stonewall, the queens decided they didn’t want to be controlled any longer.

And even before Compton’s there were the Dewey’s restaurant sit-ins in Philadelphia in April 1965. The restaurant management decided not to serve people who demonstrated “improper behavior.” The reality was that they didn’t want to serve homosexuals, especially those who didn’t wear the acceptable clothing. Meaning drag queens. A spontaneous sit-in occurred and over the next week the Janus Society, an early gay rights organization, had picketers on site handing out flyers. Most were people who had little to lose, the street kids and drag queens once again. Those LGBT people with the little animals on their polo shirts were in short supply.

Both Compton’s and Dewey’s point to the fact that in the mid-1960s the fight for black civil rights was beginning to influence the more disenfranchised in the gay community. The major difference with those two early events is that from the Stonewall riots grew a new movement, one that still lives today. Nonetheless, they deserve to be remembered.



The biggest fallacy of Stonewall is when people say, “Of course they were upset, Judy Garland was being buried that day.” That trivializes what happened and our years of oppression, and is just culturally wrong. Many of us in Stonewall who stayed on Christopher Street and didn’t run from the riot that day were people my age. Judy Garland was from the past generation, an old star. Diana Ross, the Beatles, even Barbra Streisand were the icons of our

generation. Garland meant a little something to us, as she did for many groups—"Somewhere Over the Rainbow"—but that was it. And, honestly, that song was wishful thinking, an anthem for the older generation. In that bar, we were going to smash that rainbow. We didn't have to go over anything or travel anywhere to get what we wanted. The riot was about the police doing what they constantly did: indiscriminately harassing us. The police represented every institution of America that night: religion, media, medical, legal, and even our families, most of whom had been keeping us in our place. We were tired of it. And as far as we knew, Judy Garland had nothing to do with it.

# MORTY MANFORD

*Activist and later lawyer Morty Manford was a founding member of the Gay Activists Alliance. His activism inspired his mother, Jeanne Manford, who cofounded Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). In this excerpt from his oral history interview with Eric Marcus, Manford describes the clientele at the Stonewall and his experience of the riots.*

## From Interview with Eric Marcus

MORTY MANFORD: I guess Stonewall was the next step, if you want me to pursue the personal evolution.

ERIC MARCUS: Yes, I do.

MANFORD: I was inside and I was a patron. I had sort of found that to be my favorite place.

MARCUS: So even nice people went to the Stonewall.

MANFORD: It was a very eclectic crowd. The place itself was pretty much of a dive. It was pretty shabby and the glasses weren't particularly clean when they served you a drink. And they were watered-down drinks. But they had some lights in the back on the dance floor area. There was a jukebox. There was a back room area, which in those days meant there was another bar back there and tables where people sat. It was a separate atmosphere. Some very vicious men in suits and ties entered the place and walked about a little bit and then whispers went around that the place was being raided. Suddenly the lights were turned up and the doors were

sealed. And all of the patrons were held captive until the police and the federal agents decided what they were going to do.

MARCUS: You were inside. And Sylvia Rivera was inside, too.

MANFORD: At that time I didn't know Sylvia Rivera. As I said, the patrons included every type of person. There were some transvestites. A lot of students. Young people. Older people. Businessmen.

MARCUS: It's interesting how many descriptions I've read about that bar and many of them don't include those groups of people.

MANFORD: The gay customers didn't come in suits and ties. They came in their casual clothes. But it was everybody. It was an interesting place. I had friends that I met there regularly, people I met there very well. I know from my own contacts the range of people. I suppose I still have one friend from that era that I'm still very close to.

MARCUS: Were you frightened by the raid?

MANFORD: I was anxious. Everybody was anxious. Not knowing whether we were going to be arrested or what was happening next. I wouldn't say I was afraid. It was a nervous mood that set over the place.

It may have been ten or fifteen minutes later that we were all to leave the place. We had to line up and our identification would be checked before we would be freed. And that's what happened. People who did not have identification or people who were underage and transvestites as a whole group were being detained. Those people who didn't meet their standards were incarcerated temporarily in the coatroom.

MARCUS: They were put in the closet.

MANFORD: Little did the police know the ironic symbolism of that. But they found out fast.

MARCUS: How so?

MANFORD: As people were released they didn't run away, escape the experience. They stayed outside. They awaited the release of their friends. People who were walking up and down Christopher Street, which was at that time a very busy cruising area, social strip, also assembled. The crowd in front of the Stonewall grew and grew.

MARCUS: Did you stay?

MANFORD: I stayed to watch. Some of the gays coming out of the bar would take a bow and their friends would cheer when they came out. It was a colorful thing.

MARCUS: And there were lesbians there too?

MANFORD: I don't recall any women, frankly. There were occasionally only a very few who came into the bar. It was mostly men. There may have been one, or two, or three.

MARCUS: You didn't have plans to riot while you were standing outside.

MANFORD: No. And I personally didn't riot. I was there. The tension started to grow. And after everybody who was going to be released was released, the prisoners were herded into a paddy wagon parked right on the sidewalk in front of the bar. They were left unguarded by the local police and they simply walked out and left the paddy wagon to the cheer of the throng.

MARCUS: Were these mostly transvestites?

MANFORD: There were transvestites and bar personnel, bartenders, the bouncers. There's no doubt in my mind that those people were

deliberately left unguarded because the local police were conscripted into this raid by the treasury agents. I assume there was some sort of a relationship between the bar management and the local police that they really didn't want to arrest these people.

Once all of the people were out and the prisoners went on their merry ways, the crowd stayed. I don't know how to characterize the motives of the crowd at that point, except there was a curiosity and concern about what had just happened. Somebody in the crowd started throwing pennies. Or some people in the crowd threw pennies across the street at the front of the Stonewall. The Stonewall had a couple of great big plate glass windows in the front. They were painted black on the inside. And there was a doorway in between them, which was the entrance. There was one floor above the Stonewall, which I think was used for storage space, or some such thing. Not a residence.

After the pennies, one person apparently threw a rock, which broke one of the windows on a second floor. With the shattering of glass the crowd sort of "Ooooh." It was a dramatic gesture of defiance. I think that defiant feeling was very amorphous. Certainly it was with me.

MARCUS: Did you share that feeling?

MANFORD: Yes. We had just been kicked and punched around symbolically by the police. Indirectly I had felt that all along. I had incorporated that into my own thinking. But for me there was a slight lancing of the festering wound of anger at this kind of unfair harassment and prejudice. They weren't doing this at heterosexual bars. And it's not my fault that the local bar is run by organized crime and is taking payoffs and doesn't have a liquor license. It's the only kind of bars that were permitted to serve a gay clientele because of a system of official discrimination by the State Liquor Authority and the corruption of the local police authorities. None of that was my doing. I wanted a place where I could meet other people who were also gay.



And it escalated. A few more rocks went and then somebody from inside the bar opened the door and stuck a gun out. Their arm was reaching out with a gun telling people to stay back. And then withdrew the gun, closed the door, and went back inside. Then somebody took an uprooted parking meter and broke the glass in the front window and the plywood board that was behind it. Then somebody else or other people took a garbage can, one of those wire mesh cans, and set it on fire and threw the burning garbage into the premises. The area that was set afire is where the coatroom was.

MARCUS: Burning the closet.

MANFORD: Burning the closet, exactly.

MARCUS: Sorry for all the symbolism.

MANFORD: This is your job. You've got to put this rambling into some sort of cohesive form.

They had a fire hose, and they apparently used it. It was a very small trash fire. Then they opened the front door and turned the hose on the crowd to try to keep people at a distance. And then the riot erupted. Apparently a fire engine had been summoned because of this trash fire. The fire engine started coming down the block. Then the police started to arrive. And forced the crowd . . . They came down the street in a phalanx of blue. They had their riot gear on. In those days the New York City police had a guerrilla-prone cadre of their ranks known as the Tactical Police Force, the TPF. That's who came.

Who knows whether this thing would have escalated beyond that had they not come in? Because that's what they always look for. They want a confrontation. So the way they then started chasing after people and hitting people with their billy clubs, I think that may have made it greater than it was. But nevertheless, gay people had already stood up and rebelled. Initially with a symbolic toss of a coin.

MARCUS: Did you toss any coins?

MANFORD: No. I was watching. I wasn't looking for a fight. But it was a very emotional turning point for me. Once they started attacking people and forcing people onto the side streets, I basically tried to get out of the way. People were breaking windows and I saw a little bit of that but I didn't stay too much longer. I did return the next night to see what was going on because the riot was continuing.

MARCUS: Had you seen anything like that before?

MANFORD: No. It was the first time I had seen anything like that.

MARCUS: Did the police response shock you? You said that there was an emotional change for you.

MANFORD: I think the emotional change was those minutes in front of the Stonewall when this mass of gay people—and ultimately there were probably a couple of hundred people standing in front of the bar in this crowd—acted in defiance. Psychologically I was all with this spirit, not quite knowing or being able to articulate what it was about it that was going on that made me feel so a part of it. But I can't claim credit for the small acts of violence that took place. I didn't break any windows. I wasn't the one who had a knife and cut the tires on the paddy wagon. I didn't hit a cop and I didn't get hit by a cop.

MARCUS: I'd like to make a pretty big jump, from this point of you being an observer to where you were very much an active participant. How did you make the transition from observer to activist? It sounds like it was a long journey, but I suspect it happened very quickly.

MANFORD: This festering wound, the anger of oppression and discrimination was coming out very fast at the point of Stonewall. There were a few things going on. The following week, ten days later, I went to Philadelphia, where there was an annual picket line

in front of Independence Hall, and marched in that. I think I wore sunglasses. When I saw cameras I turned my face away. But it was a process of starting to deal with it a little bit at a time.

# MARSHA P. JOHNSON AND RANDY WICKER

*Homophile-era activist Randy Wicker and trans activist Marsha P. Johnson were an unlikely pair. Wicker is a former member of Mattachine and was one of the first openly gay people to discuss their experiences on radio and television. Johnson participated in the Stonewall uprising and was a cofounder of Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR). In this oral history interview, they discuss the differences in their experiences of Stonewall and the riots.*

## From Interview with Eric Marcus

MARSHA P. JOHNSON: The way I winded up being at Stonewall that night, I was having a party uptown. And we were all out there and Miss Sylvia Rivera and them were over in the park having a cocktail.

I was uptown and I didn't get downtown until about two o'clock, because when I got downtown the place was already on fire. And it was a raid already. The riots had already started. And they said the police went in there and set the place on fire. They said the police set it on fire because they originally wanted the Stonewall to close, so they had several raids. And there was this, uh, Tiffany and, oh, this other drag queen that used to work there in the coat check room and then they had all these bartenders. And the night before the Stonewall riots started, before they closed the bar, we were all there and we all had to line up against the wall and they was all searching us.

ERIC MARCUS: The police were?

JOHNSON: Yeah, they searched every single body that came there. Because, uh, the place was supposed to be closed, and they opened anyway. 'Cause every time the police came, what they would do,

they would take the money from the coat check room and take the money from the bar. So if they heard the police were coming, they would take all the money and hide it up under the bar in these boxes, out of the register. And, you know, and sometimes they would hide, like, under the floor or something? So when the police got in all they got was the bartender's tips.

MARCUS: Who went to the Stonewall?

JOHNSON: Well, uh, at first it was just a gay men's bar. And they didn't allow no, uh, women in. And then they started allowing women in. And then they let the drag queens in. I was one of the first drag queens to go to that place. 'Cause when we first heard about this . . . and then they had these drag queens workin' there. They didn't never arrested anybody at the Stonewall. All they did was line us up and tell us to get out.

RANDY WICKER: Were you one of those that got in the chorus lines and kicked their heels up at the police, like, like Ziegfeld Folly girls or Rockettes?

JOHNSON: Oh, no. No, we were too busy throwing over cars and screaming in the middle of the street, 'cause we were so upset 'cause they closed that place.

MARCUS: What were you screaming in the street?

JOHNSON: Huh?

MARCUS: What did you say to the police?

JOHNSON: We just were saying, no more police brutality and, oh, we had enough of police harassment in the Village and other places. Oh, there was a lot of little chants we used to do in those days.

MARCUS: Randy, were you at Stonewall then as well? Did you know Marsha?

WICKER: No, no, I met Marsha, Marsha moved in here about eight years ago. I had met Marsha in 1973 as an *Advocate* reporter. The GAA people had freed her. It was, they locked up our gay sister, Marsha Johnson, but they went into the mental hospital and they snuck her out in an elevator and they ran out the door. Now the reason they . . . she was in the mental hospital is she took LSD and was sitting in the middle of either Houston Street or . . .

JOHNSON: There was no LSD . . .

WICKER: . . . pulling the sun . . .

JOHNSON: What do you call that, umm?

WICKER AND MARCUS: Mescaline?

JOHNSON: No, what's that other fierce stuff?

WICKER: Bella donna?

JOHNSON: Uh, uh. Purple . . . purple passion or something?

. . . . .

MARCUS: And you've lived together now for eight years.

WICKER: Yeah, yeah.

MARCUS: Now, were there lots of people hurt at the Stonewall that night during the riots?

JOHNSON: They weren't hurt at the Stonewall. They were hurt on the streets outside of the Stonewall 'cause people were throwing bottles and the police were out there with those clubs and things and their helmets on, the riot helmets.

MARCUS: Were you afraid of being arrested?

JOHNSON: Oh, no, because I'd been going to jail for, like, ten years before the Stonewall. I was going to jail 'cause I was, I was originally up on Forty-second Street. And every time we'd go, you know, like going out to hustle all the time they would just get us and tell us we were under arrest.

WICKER: Drag queen hooker.

JOHNSON: Yeah, they'd say, "All yous drag queens under arrest," so we, you know, it was just for wearing a little bit of makeup down Forty-second Street.

MARCUS: Who were the kinds of people you met up at Forty-second Street when you were hustling up there?

JOHNSON: Oh, this was all these queens from Harlem, from the Bronx. A lot of them are dead now. I mean, I hardly ever see anybody from those days. But these were, like, queens from the Bronx and Brooklyn, from New Jersey, where I'm from. I'm from Elizabeth, New Jersey.

WICKER: See, I, I, Stonewall, I don't want . . . I shouldn't start on this note, but it puts me in the worst light, because by the time Stonewall happened I was running my button shop in the East Village and for all the years of Mattachine and you see the pictures of me on TV, I'm wearing a suit and tie and I had spent ten years of my life going around telling people homosexuals looked just like everybody else. We didn't all wear makeup and wear dresses and have falsetto voices and molest kids and were communists and all this.

And all of a sudden Stonewall broke out and there were reports in the press of chorus lines of queens kicking up their heels at the cops like Rockettes, you know, "We are the Stonewall girls, and you know, fuck you police." And this, I thought, you know, it was like Jesse Jackson used to say, rocks through windows don't open doors. I felt this . . . I was horrified. I mean, the last thing to me that I

thought at the time they were setting back the gay liberation movement twenty years, because I mean all these TV shows and all this work that we had done to try to establish legitimacy of the gay movement that we were nice middle-class people like everybody else and, you know, adjusted and all that. And suddenly there was all this, what I considered riffraff.

.....

WICKER: Yeah, I was saying I was running my shop in East Village, the button shop, the big hippie shop, and when this happened I was horrified because it was civil disorder. Somewhere I saw a picture from the Stonewall and it had a big sign up from the Mattachine Society, which was one of my base groups. It said the Mattachine Society asked citizens to obey poli . . . to not obey the police, but to respect law and order, to act in a lawful manner. In other words, the Mattachine itself was basically a conservative organization and they had a . . .

They asked me to speak at the Electric Circus and I got up and said that I did not think that the way to win public acceptance was to go out and form chorus lines of drag queens kicking your feet up at the police. And I was just beginning to speak and one of the bouncers at the Electric Circus found out that it was a gay thing, that the guy up there talking was gay and somebody standing next to him, he said to them, "Are you one of them?" And the guy said yes and he began beating the hell out of him. And this riot broke out in the Electric Circus. And I remember driving him home, because the kid was only about twenty-one or twenty-two years old. And he said, "All I know is that I've been in this movement for three days and I've been beaten up three times." I mean, he had a black eye and, you know, a puffed-up face . . .

JOHNSON: Oh, how terrible.

WICKER: . . . and, you know, no serious damage, but the thing was that you were dealing with a new thing. And it shows that what my



generation did, we built the ideology, you know. Are we sick? Aren't we sick? What are the scientific facts? How we've been brainwashed by society? We put together, like, you know, Lenin . . . I mean, Karl Marx wrote the book. That's what we did. But it literally took Stonewall, and here I was considered the first militant and a visionary leader of the gay movement, to not even realize when the revolution, if you want to call it this, this thing that I thought would never happen, that a small nuclei of people would become a mass social movement was occurring—I was against it. Now I'm very happy Stonewall happened. I'm very happy the way things worked out.

# SYLVIA RIVERA

*An icon of the New York City LGBTQ community, Sylvia Rivera was a Puerto Rican and Venezuelan activist with the Gay Liberation Front and Gay Activists Alliance, and cofounder of Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR). In this interview, Rivera discusses the Stonewall uprising, the clubs in the Village at the time, and the oppression faced by drag queens and trans people.*

## From Interview with Eric Marcus

REY “SYLVIA LEE” RIVERA: You get a reputation after plucking cops’ nerves from 1969.

FRANK: I’m sure they’re not going to forget you scaling the walls of . . .

ERIC MARCUS: Up until 1969 you weren’t involved in gay rights or rights or any of that stuff.

RIVERA: Before gay rights, before the Stonewall I was involved in the Black liberation movement, the peace movement. I felt I had the time and I knew that I had to do something. My revolutionary blood was going back then. I was involved with that.

MARCUS: How so?

RIVERA: I did a lot of marches. I had to do something back then to show the world that there was a changing world. . . . I got involved with a lot of the different things because I had to. I had so much anger.

MARCUS: About what?

RIVERA: About the world, the way it was. The way they were treating people. When the Stonewall happened. The Stonewall was fabulous. Actually it was the first time that I had been to friggin Stonewall. It was, like, a godsent thing. I just happened to be there when it all jumped off. I said, "Well, great, now it's my time." Here, I'm out there being a revolutionists for everybody else. I said now it's time to do my thing for my own people.

MARCUS: What happened that night? Did you normally go out with your friends to the bars?

RIVERA: The Stonewall wasn't a bar for drag queens. Everybody keeps saying it was. Stonewall was not a bar for drag queens. There was one bar at that time in that era which was called the Washington Square Bar, Third Street and Broadway, where the hotel collapsed many, many years ago. That was the drag queen spot. If you were a drag queen, you could get into the Stonewall if they knew you. And there were only a certain number of drag queens that were allowed into the Stonewall at that time. This is where I get into arguments with people. They say, "Oh, no, it was a drag queen bar, it was a black bar." No, Washington Square Bar was the drag queen bar. We had just come back in from Washington, my first lover and I. At that time we were passing bad paper around and making lots of money. We were passing forged checks. And I said, "Let's go to Stonewall." And when it happened, my friend was like, "Don't go off." And I said, "Why not? I have to go off. I have to be part of this." I said, "I have to. The feeling is here." It meant a lot and I was glad I was there.

MARCUS: So you were at the bar doing what?

RIVERA: I was drinking.

MARCUS: What happened? Did the police come?

RIVERA: The police came in. They came in to get their payoff as usual. They were the same people who always used to come into the

Washington Square Bar too. You know, get their payoff. It was like, I don't know if it was the customers or it was the police. Everything just clicked.

MARCUS: When you say clicked you have to describe to me what you mean by that. I wasn't there.

RIVERA: Everybody like, "Why the fuck are we doing all this for?" The attitudes in people, and a lot of people at that time were so involved, like I said I was involved in different movements. The people at them bars, especially at the Stonewall, were involved in other movements. And everybody like, "All right, we got to do our thing. We're gonna go for it." When they ushered us out, they very nicely put you out the door. Then you're standing across the street in Sheridan Square Park. But why? Everybody's looking at each other. "But why do we have to keep on constantly putting up with this?" And the nickels, the dimes, the pennies, and the quarters started flying.

MARCUS: Why that? Why were people throwing change?

RIVERA: The payoff. That was the payoff. "You already got, and here's some more." To be there was so beautiful. It was so exciting. It was like, "Wow, we're doing it! We're doing it!" We're fucking their nerves. They thought that they could come in and say, "All right, you get out," and nothing was going to happen. They could put that padlock on the door and they knew damn well like everybody else knows that they would come in, raid a gay bar. Padlock the friggin door. As soon as the police were gone one way, the mafia was there cutting the door. They had a new register. They had more money and they had more booze. This is what we learned to live with at that time. We had to live with it until that day.

MARCUS: Did you throw any pennies or dimes?

RIVERA: I threw quarters, and pennies, and whatnot.

MARCUS: How were you dressed that night?

RIVERA: I wasn't in full drag. I was dressed very pleasantly. I was wearing a woman's suit. Bell bottoms were out then. I had made this fabulous suit at home and I was wearing that and I had the hair out.

MARCUS: What color fabric?

RIVERA: It was a light beige. Something very summery. Lots of makeup and lots of hair.

MARCUS: Did you have heels on?

RIVERA: I was wearing boots. I don't know why I was wearing boots.

MARCUS: Were you still hustling at the time?

RIVERA: Oh yeah.

MARCUS: What happened next?

RIVERA: We're throwing the pennies and everything is going off really fab. The cops locked themselves in the bar. It was getting vicious. There was Molotov cocktails coming in. I don't know where they got Molotov cocktails, but they were thrown through the door. The cops, they just panicked. Inspector Pine really panicked. Plus he had no backup. He did not expect any of the retaliation that the gay community gave him.

MARCUS: Do you think that this happened in part because people were so angry for so long?

RIVERA: People were very angry for so long. How long can you live in the closet? I listen to my brothers and sisters who are older than I am and I listen to their stories. I would never have made it. They would have killed me. Somebody would have killed me. I could

never have survived the lives that my brothers and sisters from the forties and fifties did. Because I have a mouth.

MARCUS: Did you say anything that night out in front of the Stonewall?

RIVERA: Oh, I was instigating certain things. But I knew we would get it. I got knocked around a bit by a couple of plainclothes men. I didn't really get hurt. I was very careful that night, thank God. But I saw other people being hurt by the police. There was one drag queen, they brought her out, I don't know what she said, they just beat her into a bloody pulp. There was a couple of dykes they took out and threw in a car. They got out the other side. It was inhumane, senseless bullshit.

MARCUS: They treated you like animals.

RIVERA: That's what we were called anyway. We were the lowest scum of the earth at that time.

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MARCUS: What were you trying to do? What were your hopes?

RIVERA: Marsha and I fought for the liberation of our people. We did a lot back then. We did sleep in the streets. Marsha and I had a building on Second Street, which we called STAR House. When we asked the community to help us [tears coming down face] there was nobody to help us. We were nothing. We were nothing! We were taking care of kids that were younger than us. Marsha and I were young and we were taking care of them. And GAA had teachers and lawyers and all we asked was to help us teach our own so we could all become a little bit better. There was nobody there to help us. They left us hanging. There was only one person that that came and help us. Bob Kohler was there. He helped paint. He helped us put wires together. We didn't know what the fuck we were doing. We took a slum building. We tried. We really did. We tried. Marsha and

I and a few of the other older drag queens. We kept it going for about a year or two. We went out and made that money off the streets to keep these kids off the streets. We already went through it. We wanted to protect them. To show them that there was a better life. You can't throw people out on the street.

MARCUS: Who were these young kids? Where did they come from?

RIVERA: From everywhere. We had kids from Boston, California, everywhere.

MARCUS: Where were their families?

RIVERA: I guess at home. They were good kids. I've seen a couple of them after the movement. The ones that I've seen they've done very well. It makes you feel good, it does.

MARCUS: Things didn't turn out as you had hoped.

RIVERA: Well, you figure it's always going to happen. Every time I see the commercial for Covenant House, I say, "I would love to have had that." I would love to have seen a STAR House. These kids already knew. You always get that feeling. You're different. We just didn't have the money. The community was not going to help us.

MARCUS: Were they embarrassed by you?

RIVERA: The community is always embarrassed by the drag queens.

# MARTIN BOYCE

*As a young queen, Stonewall veteran Martin Boyce did “scare drag” in the 1960s to “pluck the nerves” of straight people. In his oral history interview he remembers how quickly Stonewall changed participants’ self-perceptions, as well as transforming straight perceptions of the LGBTQ community.*

## From Oral History Interview with Eric Marcus

ERIC MARCUS: How many hours were you out there?

MARTIN BOYCE: Oh, I don’t know, because when I tried out, it was early in the morning, and by the time I left the sun was coming up. But by that time we were sitting on stoops and even sometimes cops were sitting down near us, you know. We were all exhausted. And it was not, you know, a war against straight people. It was a war against the cops. And even then, you know when fins is fins. You know when to let off. You know, the cops stopped. And we stopped. And now we were just two people involved in different sides of a riot, like, sometimes sitting very close to each other. Or, you know, cops not reaching out, not doing anything to you.

MARCUS: What happened to your friends that night? Were any of them arrested or hurt?

BOYCE: Oh, people got hurt, because, you know, we weren’t baseball players. When the gays were throwing things, they were hitting the wrong people. But most of the time the bloody casualties was collateral damage. Friendly fire. That’s why we discouraged some queens from throwing bricks. Because, you know, it was gonna hit somebody in the head, it was like . . . that’s why we kept it down to



things that could go far quickly, from a nimble hand, you know? Though some good, I mean, some good.

MARCUS: I've never heard that description before, but when you think about it, it's funny.

BOYCE: Oh, those that got wounded were not unhappy. It was that strong. It was an amazing night.

MARCUS: Was it a badge, was it a badge of honor if you'd been hurt?

BOYCE: It was, well, yes, but there was more sympathy, you know, because, you know, you could have gotten hurt by an enemy, but you were really forgiven. They would look at you and say, "You bitch." Or they were campy. They would just say, "Where the fuck did you learn to throw a spear?" Some queen got hit with a wood. And it was this queen, I mean a Black queen, so it was real camp, you know, because we were not, you know, we had, it was not even a racial society, we were all equal. And you could say things like that to queens. I thought it was very funny. And, so, it was, it was a night of unity. It really, really was. And it's a pity—you know, there were, of course, I mean, it's silly, possibly, it's silly to think that maybe three to four hundred people all were scare drag. There weren't that many scare drags in the Village. I guess that point is never brought up. The scare drags initiated it, were the storm troopers of it, but they were not alone. You know, they lit the torch. They were never gonna carry it, but they lit it, and they should be honored for that. But there were A Gays and all kind of . . . everybody there was doing something. Even if you were watching. I have a friend who was just watching. He was in the bar, he had ID, they put him across the street, and he just stood there and watched. But that watching was support. No one was scowling at us. Shocked that we were going this far, I mean, you could see some of the gasping, like, "Really? Are they throwing bricks? Are they really doing it?"

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MARCUS: So you were out there on the stoop in the early morning hours. Were you with any of your friends, or you were by yourself?

BOYCE: Birdie was exhausted and his head was over his knees. He was almost asleep. And he was on another stoop, I saw him. I was not tired, I was just thinking what the future was gonna be like, and it didn't look good.

MARCUS: How come?

BOYCE: Because this was a riot, and it was really bad. It was, the street was a wreck.

MARCUS: Broken windows? Broken cars?

BOYCE: Broken windows and burnt things, and burnt ash can, and shops were smashed, and very gay in the sense of you saw, sometimes, the little piece of pink or green tulle. You know, and the street was littered with glass that was, when the sun started coming up the lamp lights were catching it, it was absolutely beautiful. It was one of the most beautiful things I saw. Most modern art doesn't reach that point of, that height or that association. It was so, it was the riot. There it was. All broken but beautiful. I should have known that was a sign, an omen, but I didn't.

MARCUS: So what was, what were you thinking that night about the future, about what was next?

BOYCE: Well, they were gonna get us. And now Christopher Street was now going to be off-limits. And now they're gonna watch us. And now they're gonna really harass us. And now they have reason. And we had made fools of them. This was going to be a big problem. They didn't like to be made fools of. Maybe one individually, but not a group. They couldn't handle a bunch of fags, they couldn't. No. Everybody was shocked that knew in the city that the fags had—my father was shocked. My father said, "About time you fags did something." He had seen all his life. 'Cause my father was the type

to help somebody, you know, he many times got a gay guy into the cab because they were being chased, he could see. My father's a very nice guy. And, but that didn't happen. It, there was congratulations in the course of the week that people liked us. 'Cause this was New York.

MARCUS: So what would people, what would people say to you? You're talking about the street in your neighborhood?

BOYCE: Oh, yes.

MARCUS: What would they say?

BOYCE: They'd say things that, "How did it go down there?" and, you know. "What happened down there?" or they would ask, or they would say, like, you look different. "You people look different," someone told me.

MARCUS: What do you—do you think people looked different? That gay people looked different?

BOYCE: I started looking after they told me that. It was a man from the church. He said, "You people look different." And I didn't ask him anything, 'cause I didn't want to discuss it. And then I saw a sanitation worker, really strong, powerful man, the least likely, who looked at me and saw how loud I was and just lifted his arm in the salute. So there were—

MARCUS: In a fist salute?

BOYCE: A fist salute. The Black salute.

MARCUS: Ha! To you!

BOYCE: Yes.

MARCUS: Was it someone you knew, or you were just—

BOYCE: No, I didn't know him, he just saw me, looked me up and down and went like—

MARCUS: Ha!

BOYCE: Because we're fighters. Now we start to realize, and I think that is the beginning of gay liberation. You know, now we realize what we can do. Now we realize to put together the powers we did have.

## EDMUND WHITE

*Novelist and memoirist Edmund White first wrote about Stonewall in his novel The Beautiful Room Is Empty, and later returned to describe his own experience of the uprising in his memoir City Boy. Rejecting puritanically political interpretations of the uprising, White makes the unique point that the riot was ultimately fought for the right to pleasure.*

### From *City Boy*

From the time of the World's Fair in 1964 to the beginning of gay liberation, the Stonewall uprising in 1969, the city was repeatedly being cleaned up. Subway toilets were always being locked shut. Bars were constantly raided. I remember one, the Blue Bunny, up in the Times Square area near the bar where they first danced the twist. There was a tiny dance floor at the back. If a suspicious-looking plainclothesman came in (supposedly you could tell them by their big, clunky shoes), the doorman would turn on little white Christmas lights strung along the ceiling in back, and we'd break apart and stop dancing while the music roared on. I can remember a two-story bar over near the Hudson on a side street south of Christopher that was only open a week or two. When the cops rushed in, we all jumped out the second-story window onto a low, adjoining graveled roof and then down a flight of stairs and onto the street. I used to go to the Everard Baths at 28 West Twenty-eighth Street near Broadway. It was filthy and everyone said it was owned by the police. It didn't have the proper exits or fire extinguishers, just a deep, foul-smelling pool in the basement that looked infected. When the building caught fire in 1977, several customers died. There was no sprinkler system. It was a summer weekend.

On Fire Island it was scarcely better in those days. Of course the Suffolk County police couldn't control what went on in the dunes or along the shore at night, but in discos in both Cherry Grove and the Pines, every group of dancing men had to include at least one woman. A disco employee sat on top of a ladder and beamed a flashlight at a group of guys who weren't observing the rule. At a dance club over in the Hamptons, I recall, the men line-danced and did the hully-gully, but always with at least one woman in the line.

Then everything changed with the Stonewall uprising toward the end of June 1969. And it wasn't all those crewnecked white boys in the Hamptons and the Pines who changed things, but the black kids and Puerto Rican transvestites who came down to the Village on the subway (the "A-trainers"), and who were jumpy because of the extreme heat and who'd imagined the police persecutions of the preceding years had finally wound down. The new attacks made them feel angry and betrayed. They were also worked up because Judy Garland had just died of an overdose and was lying in state at the Riverside Memorial Chapel. At the end of Christopher Street, just two blocks away, rose the imposing bulk of the Jefferson Market women's prison (now demolished to make way for a park). At that time, tough women would stand on the sidewalk down below and call up to their girlfriends, "I love you, baby. If you give it up to that big black bitch Shareefa, I cut you up, I'm telling you, baby, I cut you good." Inside the Stonewall the dance floor had been taken over by the long-legged, fierce-eyed antics of the STAR members (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries). Angry lesbians, angrier drag queens, excessive mourning, staggering heat, racial tensions, the examples of civil disobedience set by the women's movement, the antiwar protesters, the Black Panthers—all the elements were present and only a single flame was needed to ignite the bonfire.

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The Stonewall wasn't really a disco. It had a jukebox, a good one, and two big, long rooms where you could dance. Bars were open till

four in the morning in New York; gay guys would come home from work, eat, go to bed having set the alarm for midnight, and stay out till four. Of course there were no internet sites, but also no telephone dating lines, no backrooms, and up till then no trucks or wharves open to sex.

There was a lot of street cruising and a lot of bar cruising. We had to have cool pickup lines. We were all thin from amphetamines; my diet doctor was always prescribing “speed” for me, and I’d still be up at six in the morning reading the yellow pages with great and compulsive fascination. We had long, dirty hair and untrimmed sideburns and hip-huggers and funny black boots that zipped up the side and denim cowboy shirts with pearlescent pressure-pop buttons. We had bell-bottoms. We all smoked all the time (I was up to three packs a day). We didn’t have big showboat muscles or lots of attitude. Our shoulders were as narrow as our hips. We didn’t look hale, but we were healthy—this was twelve years before AIDS was first heard of and all we got was the clap. We had that a lot, maybe once a month, since no one but paranoid married men used condoms. I dated my clap doctor, who spent most of his free time copying van Gogh sunflowers.

I would go to the Stonewall and drink three or four vodka tonics to get up the nerve to ask John Stipanela, a high school principal, to dance. I had a huge crush on him but he wasn’t interested in bedding me, though we did become friends. One night there I picked up an ultra-WASP boy working in his family business of import-export, but I found him a bit too passive—until I discovered he was the guy my office-mate at work was obsessively in love with and had been mooning over for months. I felt bad about cock-blocking my office-mate (“bird-dogging,” as we said then) and sort of impressed with myself that I’d scored where he, a much better looking man, had failed.



Then there was the raid, the whimper heard round the world, the fall of our gay Bastille. On June 28, 1969, the bar was raided, and for

the first time gays resisted. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms staged the raid, since they'd discovered the liquor bottles in the bar were bootlegged and that the local police precinct was in cahoots with the Mafia owners. As the patrons and workers were being led out of the bar and pushed into a paddy wagon, the angry crowd that had gathered outside began to boo. Then some of the queens inside the van began to fight back—and a few escaped. The crowd was energized by the violence.

Everyone was so pissed off over that particular police raid because once the World's Fair was over, the cops seemed to forget about us and lots of new bars had opened. There were raids, but only once a month and usually early in the evening, so as not to spoil the later, serious hours of cruising and dancing and flirting and drinking. Now we had a new, handsome mayor, John Lindsay. But he only looked better. He was in constant conflict with the unions, with antiwar protesters, with student radicals who took over Columbia—and with the gay community.

Before the Stonewall uprising there hadn't really been much of a gay community, just guys cruising Greenwich Avenue and Christopher Street. But when the police raided Stonewall and gay men feared their bars were going to be closed once again, all hell broke loose. I was there, just by chance, and I remember thinking it would be the first funny revolution. We were calling ourselves the Pink Panthers and doubling back behind the cops and coming out behind them on Gay Street and Christopher Street and kicking in a chorus line. We were shouting "Gay is good" in imitation of the slogan "Black is beautiful."

Up till that moment we had all thought that homosexuality was a medical term. Suddenly we saw that we could be a minority group—with rights, a culture, an agenda. June 28, 1969, was a big date in gay history.

GLBT leaders like to criticize young gays for not taking the movement seriously, but don't listen to them. Just remember that at Stonewall we were defending our right to have fun, to meet each other, and to have sex.



A Black Maria had carted off half the staff and a few kicking, writhing drag queens, while the rest of the policemen waited inside with the others. I'd been walking past with a friend and now joined in, though resistance to authority made me nervous. I thought we shouldn't create a fuss. This was bad for our image. I said out loud, "Oh, come on, guys."

Yet even I got excited when the crowd started battering down the barricaded door with a ripped-up parking meter and when someone tossed lit garbage into the bar. No matter that we were defending a Mafia club. The Stonewall was a symbol, just as the leveling of the Bastille had been. No matter that only six prisoners had been in the Bastille and one of those was Sade, who clearly deserved being locked up. No one chooses the right symbolic occasion; one takes what's available.

# HOLLY WOODLAWN

*Puerto Rican transgender actress and singer Holly Woodlawn may be best known for starring in the Warhol films *Trash* and *Women in Revolt*, among her many other performances. In her autobiography, *Low Life in High Heels*, Woodlawn describes her experiences at the Stonewall as well as the transgender Latinx community living in the Village at the time.*

## *From A Low Life in High Heels*

I scrounged around and eventually moved in with some other queens I had befriended at the Stonewall, this little gay bar on Christopher Street across from Sheridan Square, right in the hub of the West Village. The Stonewall was a popular after-hours watering hole, but because of the frequent police raids on the gay bars at this time, the place was very careful when it came to allowing people inside. It had the setup of a Roaring Twenties speakeasy. To enter, you knocked on the door and waited for the bouncer to answer. If you looked okay, you would be admitted.

Inside it was very dark, with a long bar to one side and go-go boys in bikinis dancing on either end. It had a dance floor and a jukebox. The place attracted an eclectic bunch: butch guys, preppy boys, older men, a few lesbians, and a few so-called straight men sprinkled in between. Well, at least their wives and kids thought they were straight. Anyway, it was these straight patrons that attracted me. I wasn't interested in gay men because I thought I was a woman and I wanted to be treated accordingly, unlike some of the other girls who could put on pants and become a man. I was a woman regardless of what I was wearing.

Also, there are different degrees of transvestism. There are some men who are very straight and only have sex with women, but get excited over wearing panties and a dress. Then there are those men such as myself, who want to live as women and go to the extreme of shooting hormones and undergoing electrolysis treatments so they can look real. Looking real was very important in my mind, because if there was any question that I was a man in drag, I could be arrested, and worse yet, I could be killed by homo-hating hoodlums! It was during this period of the mid-Sixties when all the “girls” in the West Village were starting to come out of their closets. Or their dressing rooms, as I like to say. So I felt right at home.

Anyway, me and the girls were holed up in a tawdry little rooming house on West Tenth Street and Hudson in the West Village, near the river. We were all piled into one room, fought for mirror time in the community bath down the hall, and formed our own sorority: Phi Kappa Drag!

Life had definitely taken a step in the right direction. I slept during the days and partied throughout the nights, popping pills and dancing until dawn. I was twenty-two and no one enjoyed her youth more than I. It was a carefree existence, free of stress and the everyday pressures of the working class. I didn’t have a job because I didn’t want one. Besides, I could happily exist on handouts from friends, and who had time for work anyway? I was far too busy reading *Vogue* magazines and dreaming of my future as a beautiful model. After all, it was the dreams that kept me afloat during these hard times. And by hard times, I’m not just referring to when I was broke and in the gutter, but the times when I wondered about where I was heading. Or who I was. And whether I should have gotten a sex change. I didn’t know, and I didn’t want to think about it. And so I kept dreaming, hoping one day I would know the answers.

Usually, all the “girls” would pool their pennies to pay the rent. Sometimes I had money, sometimes I didn’t, but we all looked out for one another and made sure no one was stuck out in the street. It was back to the same old routine of living hand-to-mouth, and too often the hand was empty.

Miss Liz Eden, a notorious transvestite hooker, lived down the hall. She was continually turning tricks with a guy who would come in to see her from Queens.

“Sonny’s coming! Sonny’s coming and he’s gorgeous!” she would scream down the hall, and all the girls would flutter about like chickens in a henhouse. Sonny was a straight man who had a wife and kids, but every now and then he popped up at Miss Eden’s door for a sampling of her charms. Eventually, he professed his love and said he’d do anything for her. Well, she of course pounced on the opportunity and told him she wanted a pussy. And not the kind with nine lives, if you get my drift. So Sonny robbed a bank to get her one. Boy, was he a fool for love. The story made the headlines and became the inspiration for the film *Dog Day Afternoon*.

There were always straight men traipsing in and out of the building, to drop their drawers as well as some dough. If one of my roomies had a trick coming over, the rest of us would hide upstairs or down the hall until services were rendered. Then after the trick was turned, we’d spend the money on makeup and get all gussied up for the Stonewall, hunting for straight men who would dump their girlfriends after the date and come to us for a night of frolic!

Most of the “girls” were unreadable, which meant nobody could read—or rather tell—their true gender. And then there were the black and Puerto Rican queens who were very readable, meaning they would hang out the windows of our seedy hovel and snap their fingers at the people walking by. And this was not one little snap, darling. It was a whole slew of snaps that came out of a hand that waved up, down, and to the sides while a barrage of verbal abuse peppered with “Miss Thing” and “Motherfucker” hurled from their torrid tongues.

“Reading” was a form of cutting a person down to size, and these girls never missed a chance to get their fingers right in an unsuspecting face and snap away. The Puerto Rican queens in New York City were the most vicious. If the snaps didn’t do the job, they’d use a knife. These girls were psychotic. They ran in packs, and I made sure I stayed clear of their path. They carried razor blades in their hairdos and knives in their panties. I heard all sorts

of horrifying stories about these psycho queens from hell terrorizing the Lower East Side. One night a poor queen was walking the street alone in the wrong part of town when a sultry Puerto Rican approached.

“Oh, girl, ju so pretty.” She smiled. “Ju skin is so pretty and white, baby.”

“Oh, thank you,” said the queen, taken in by this brush of flattery, when suddenly the spik gingerly reached behind her head and pulled a razor out of her wig! She slashed the queen’s face repeatedly and scarred her for life—all because she was too pretty.

They were very sly, these Puerto Rican queens. They would not take shit from anyone. One night on Fourth Street in the East Village a car filled with straight guys began to taunt a Puerto Rican queen lounging outside of a closed liquor store.

“Hey, faggot!” one guy hollered as the car pulled alongside the curb and stopped in front of the queen. “How’d you like your ass kicked?”

The queen stared at them, expressionless, then shot up, “Ju tink I’m a faggot? Huh? Ju calling me a faggot?”

One of the guys got out of the car and approached him. He was far bigger than the queen, at least six feet tall with the build of a football player.

“Yeah, I’m calling you a faggot.”

And as he stepped closer, the queen shouted, “Yeah, well, take dis, motherfucker!” The queen pulled a knife out of his pants and plunged it repeatedly into the guy’s stomach.

I never messed with these psycho queens, and stayed as far away from them as possible. It was strange. All of us queens were walking the same path in life. Who would’ve expected such rivalries? But our living conditions were wretched. We were all living like rats on top of each other. And rats have to protect themselves and their territory. And so the Puerto Ricans formed these little gangettes that terrorized the gutter.

.....

I was in a twirl, with mad little fantasies reeling through my head like previews in a movie house. But my onstage wizardry would have to wait, as I had no time to dabble with dialogue. It was happy hour, and I had to dabble in a cocktail! And so off I went to the Stonewall to raise hell, wreak havoc, and romp to my heart's delight.

The Stonewall was right across from Sheridan Square, between Waverly and Christopher Streets. The Square was a well-manicured lawn surrounded by an iron fence, with a statue of Colonel Sheridan in the middle. It was a very nonthreatening, friendly atmosphere frequented by panhandlers, bums, and drag queens.

The West Village was an eclectic neighborhood. The Women's House of Detention was just around the corner between Greenwich Avenue and Sixth Avenue, and all night long the lesbians bayed at the moon or hung out the windows, bellowing sweet nothings to their lovers on the grounds below. Also, a variety of antique, thrift, and specialty shops filled the area. McNulty's Coffee Shop was on Christopher Street, right off Bleecker—which is where I occasionally hung out. It was the hubbub of liberated New York.

Hanging out in the Village became a nightly ritual. Sometimes I'd go to the bars and the coffee houses, and then sometimes I'd just sit on a doorstep with friends and drink a bottle of wine. Pagan Pink Ripple, of course.

The Stonewall was frequented by a lot of unique people going through major gender changes. We flocked there because it was a place where we were fawned over. We were treated like women, and as far as we knew, we were women. The black "girls" tried to look like the Supremes and the white "girls" tried to look like the Shangri-Las. Our breasts were fabulous and we had the best makeup, but the gay boys gave us the derogatory label "hormone queens," which I found to be deplorable. A "hormone queen" is a man who is so serious about passing as a woman that he has taken estrogen. I hated the term, but you know how our society is when it comes to labels.

For a while, I dated a policeman who had no idea I was a man. I met him one night while walking down MacDougal Street with Miss Candy Darling. He was an undercover cop, and he used to corner

kids who were smoking grass, take their dope, and then ask me if I wanted to smoke it with him! We used to make out in his car while he was on duty. He was handsome and young (about twenty-five) with dark hair. He never knew a thing about me, although he thought Candy was weird. He would see her wearing that trench coat, babushka, and cherry-red lipstick, and acting very evasive and aloof, and he'd say to me, "You know, your girlfriend is really strange."

To which I would retort, "Of course, darling, she's an actress!" I liked him a lot, but he wanted more of me, which, as you and I know, wasn't available!

June 26, 1969, was a hot, muggy Thursday night. The humidity in the air was unbearable because every queen in the city was in tears. Judy Garland was dead, and her funeral would be the following afternoon at Campbell's. Poor Judy.

That afternoon I ran into Candy Darling, who was on her way to Campbell's for the final viewing, clutching to her chest a worn Judy Garland album cover. "It's such a shame," she said softly, wiping a tear from her eye. "Judy, gone. It's so sad."

Yes, it was sad. I went to the Stonewall that night, but left early, wandering through the thick humidity, feeling it cling to me as I thought to myself, "Judy's dead. Wow." She died of a drug overdose and I felt bad for her, but it didn't stop me from tampering with the same stuff. I felt it would never happen to me; overdoses were for "other people."

When I returned to the Stonewall the next night, there was so much commotion—sirens blaring, people screaming—I thought a bomb had gone off. The cops were everywhere, and a chill shot up my spine as I drew closer, fearing the worst. I wedged myself into the mob for a closer look and heard a raspy voice scream, "Asshole!" A street queen named Crazy Sylvia had just broken a gin bottle over a cop's head! I couldn't believe my eyes. Suddenly, the mob (which largely consisted of gay men) began throwing bottles and stones against the door that the young cop had been guarding.

A tall, skinny street queen named Miss Marsha called to me from the crowd. "Holly, girl!" She screeched and waved her banged arm

into the air, flagging me down. Miss Marsha was black as coal, with an orange-brown wig that usually sat cockeyed on her bobbing head. Her skirt was tied in the back where the zipper had been ripped, her blouse was tied into a halter, and she always wore house slippers with her stockings, which were rolled down around her shins. Usually, whenever I saw Miss Marsha sashaying down the street, I quickly dodged to the other side to avoid contact. But this time the crowd was too thick and I was stuck. And she had already spotted me, so I couldn't hide. I was doomed.

"Oh, Miss Thing!" She waved again, pushing and shoving her lanky hips my way. "Honey, dawlin', get over here, child! Mmmmmm, girl, the queens are holdin' the cops hostage. Here, have a drink!" And she handed me a bottle in a rumpled brown bag. "Drink it, dawlin', it's the Pride of Cucamonga!"

And so I was introduced to the Pride of Cucamonga at only \$2.98 a gallon. Little did I know it would be my chosen fruit of the vine in leaner days to come.

Miss Marsha was the Hedda Hopper of Christopher Street, and she was always in the know, doling out the filthiest tidbits of gossip I had ever heard. No one knew where she came from, no one knew where she'd been, and to tell you the truth, no one cared! But you could always find her on a corner spilling the beans on someone. Once she filled me in on what was happening, she snatched the Pride of Cucamonga out of my hand and darted back into the crowd, shaking her bubble butt and rolling her bugged eyes while ranting, raving, and screaming at the police, "Oh, dawlin'! Oh, honey! Let me tell you—"

These were the Stonewall riots, and Miss Marsha was the debutante! The media coverage brought the riots nationwide attention, making it the greatest single event in the history of gays. Personally, I think some queen took too many Tuinals, started ranting and raving, and before he knew it, a revolution had started! When people are feeling fabulous, they don't want to take any crap from anybody, particularly the cops. And it was a hot night, Judy was dead, and the cops were out busting balls. Well, they went too



far this time, and before they had a chance to get a grip on the situation, it had snowballed into the gay movement.

The Stonewall riots became a milestone for the gay community not only because it was the biggest gay riot in history, but because it was the first time Miss Marsha got on TV! Darling, she made the six o'clock news, and she appeared so worldly for a girl of the gutter. Even her wig was on straight. I'm surprised they didn't erect a statue of Miss Marsha on top of Sheridan's shoulders, waving a pint of Cucamonga in honor of her carryings on.

# JAYNE COUNTY

*Punk singer and counterculture icon Jayne County participated in the Stonewall riots. In her memoir, Man Enough to Be a Woman, she describes the profound effect the riots had on her life and the central role “street queens” played in the action.*

## *From Man Enough to Be a Woman*

This was when my life in New York City really began to take off. Lee and I started hanging out in a club called the Sewer on West 18th Street, which was open later than the Stonewall. It was the same kind of place. There was a jukebox, and you’d put your quarter in and hear “Love Child” by the Supremes, “Touch Me” by the Doors, and “The Weight” by Jackie deShannon. We could take people back to the flat without fear of what Sandra might think. And we started to meet some very interesting people. The Sewer was a hangout for Charles Ludlam’s Ridiculous Theatrical Company, who were the hippest underground group in town, and for a lot of drag queens. The first time I ever saw Holly Woodlawn was at the Sewer, wearing a short dress and a long fall, before she became a Warhol superstar. I think Holly was a friend of two drag queens from the Stonewall, Miss Tammy and Miss Twiggy, who Lee had befriended. Miss Tammy modeled herself on Tammy Wynette, and Miss Twiggy looked just like Twiggy. Lee had taken some great photographs of them, which they’d shown to all their friends, so already Lee was building up this reputation as the photographer of all the freaks in the Village.

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Something else happened in the Summer of 1969 that changed my life, although it wasn't until years later that I recognized it as anything terribly important. I was on my way to the Stonewall one Friday night in June, and when I got to Sheridan Square there was a bit of commotion in the street. One of the regulars came rushing over and told me that the police had raided the Stonewall, roughed up a lot of the queens, stuck them behind the bar, and done sex searches on them to establish that they were men. Miss Peaches and Miss Marcia, two of the mouthiest street queens in the Village, were really furious, and they'd run round to the front of the bar, shut the door, piled up trash against it and set fire to it while the cops were still in there. When I arrived there were scorch marks all over the door, and cop cars coming from all directions. Everyone was running around the Village going, "They're raiding the Stonewall!" People began to gather, and it grew and grew.

The queens got very vocal, and some of them started to pick things up and throw them at the police. At one point a police car came down Christopher Street, and five or six queens leapt on it and started jumping up and down on the roof, and the roof just caved in. More and more people arrived and started joining in. Word was getting around. There were hundreds of people standing around wondering what to do. I was with a group of queens, and we started walking up Christopher Street going, "Gay power! Gay power! Gay power!" We walked all the way to Eighth Avenue, and then we all looked at each other and said, "What do we do now?" So we turned round and walked all the way back down Christopher Street, still yelling, "Gay power!" By the time we got back to the Stonewall there were hundreds more people there. They stopped the traffic. The buses couldn't get through. People were screaming, "Gay power!" at the passengers on the buses. More fires had been started. At one point, we were on the corner of Sheridan Square, and we could see the police lining up along Greenwich Avenue with riot gear and shields and everything, so we all put our arms round each other and started dancing along singing, "We are the Pixie Girls, we wear our hair in curls, we never play with toys, we'd rather play with boys," to the tune of "Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom-De-Ay." The policemen were laughing.

In the end they cordoned the whole area off, and people were rioting there all night.

The riots went on for hours and hours and dispersed really late. The next night everybody just went down there and did it again. The Sunday was a kind of fizzled-out version. I was walking along the street on the Sunday, and Miss Peaches came up to me. She was still furious, and she said to me, "I was in Sheridan Square Park and this policeman moved me on, he was really hassling me! Riot tonight! Riot tonight!" She and her friends were walking up and down Christopher Street telling everyone, "Riot tonight!" but it didn't really happen.

The bars were getting raided regularly, and people just got fed up. There was something in the air anyway; riots were happening a lot in America at that time—anti-Vietnam, anti-police, anti-whatever. If you were out and you heard something was happening, you'd say, "Oh, let's go and be in the demonstration!"

The queens took the lead in the Stonewall Riots. They walked around in semi-drag with teased hair and false eyelashes on and they didn't give a shit what anybody thought about them. What did they have to lose? Absolutely fucking nothing. A lot of people were standing around as the Riots began wondering, "I wonder if I should do this. It's going to be a big step for me, a big statement." But for the queens it really wasn't. It was just an extension of the lives they were already living on the streets. Nowadays, the Stonewall Riots are regarded as the birth of gay liberation, but for me and the other street queens, it wasn't such an amazingly important thing; we were already out there.

I remember going into work on the Monday after the Riots and talking to this very straight hippie guy there, telling him what had happened in the Village and how everyone had been yelling for gay power. "That'll never happen," he said. "Fags can never get organized." I think a lot of people believed that. It took a long time for anyone to start thinking in political terms. The Riots weren't really a political thing in themselves. Of course, the Stonewall closed down, and I was looking for a new scene to get involved with.

## JAY LONDON TOOLE

*Activist and storyteller Jay London Toole cofounded Queers for Economic Justice. At the time of the Stonewall uprising, Toole was living on the streets of the Village and was caught up in the action of the riots. Toole's story shows that we will never know how many people were pulled into the action that week and whose lives were changed.*

### From New York City Trans Oral History Project Interview with Theodore Kerr and Abram J. Lewis

AJ LEWIS: And were you still, um, mostly in Washington Square Park by 1969? I'm sort of walking us up to the Stonewall Riot.

JAY LONDON TOOLE: Yeah, in sixty-nine I was twenty? Twenty-one, something like that, you know, and still, I was in between Washington Square Park and uh, the Piers, you know? And also in the little park across the street from Stonewall, you know, a lot of us would stay in that park also, you know? Excuse me, uh. So, uh, with Stonewall, it was—most of us were still in the parks drinking, drugging, you know, stoned out of my mind you know, so Stonewall had happened, and probably going on for an hour or so more, before word got down that, you know, because people were coming in and out, and by the time word came up to us, you know, I don't know how long the riot was going on, you know, and you know, riot, rebellion, you know. By the time we got up there, I can remember the cops pushing everybody down towards Greenwich Avenue, you know? Not Greenwich Street, Greenwich Avenue. Past the infirmary, that [inaudible] building, and how people were coming up around. You know, I could see the garbage cans on fire, and I

could see thousands of people, you know, just—you know, I think back on it now, and it took me fifty years to realize, wow, that happened! I had not a clue. Every—being homeless, a lot of times you're cut off from everything. Especially from where I came from and where I ended up, you know, it was a complete not knowing anything about what was going on anymore, because my drug addiction took me to other levels, you know? So you know sobering up and uh, meeting all the people from QEJ and them talking about you know the uprising at Stonewall, and I never told anybody that I was there. Never. And then Reina Gossett and Ola, uh, said you need to say that, you know? Because I heard about these people called the Stonewall Veterans, you know, and I was like, no, I'm not a Stonewall Veteran. And it was like no, you need to say what you'd seen then—and that's when I—and it took me fifty-something years to start talking about that, you know? Uh, I was there that night. I don't remember much of it, you know, but I was part of it, you know? And I got into this argument with one of the Stonewall Veterans, you know, I was talking about the TDOA a few years ago, and one of the Veterans was there because he heard me, that I was going to speak, you know? Him and another fellow that was a veteran, but ended up now being a friend of mine. So after I gave my speech, he came over to me and he said, you know, what did you do that night? You know, were you arrested? Were you beaten? You know. I was like—he was like, oh, you were on the sidelines, you know? And I know my temper and I know my anger, you know, and over these years I've learned how to control it and not to get into any altercations because I know where I'd go with it you know, so my friend Tammy jumped in and started screaming at him, you know, Tammy *[Laughter]*. But anyway, I started talking about that night, those seven or eight people that were arrested did not make that riot, did not make that rebellion, did not make that uproar. It was every fucking person that showed up in the thousands that made it. If it was only—we were arrested all the time, you know? We'd be put in paddy wagons constantly and beaten up constantly. It wasn't those seven or eight people that made it. It was everybody as a community coming together and saying that's enough, you

know? And that's what I believe, and you know, I feel it in my heart. I know they don't like hearing it [*Laughter*], because they like being in that front car, the convertible [*Laughter*], but it's the people that showed up that night, you know? And I try to tell people, especially young folks, you know, it's like, I'd seen everybody there, you know—don't let it be whitewashed that it was only these white people that did this, because I'd seen every shade, every color, every body image there that night. It was all of us together, you know? And don't let any history book tell you different, any movie, screenplay, you know, it's them just telling it, what they see. And it took me a long time to figure that out. There we go—is this back on?

LEWIS: Yeah, it's on.

TOOLE: Okay.

LEWIS: Can you tell me a little bit—so what was Stonewall the bar like?

TOOLE: Uh, smelly. Dark. Uh, I tried not to drink there at all because you never knew what you were fucking drinking, you know? So I'd always bring a bottle in my hip pocket or something to drink. Uh, it was mostly uh gay men, uh, drag queens, uh, and very noisy [*Laughter*]. You know. But it was a friendly atmosphere, you know, the door was usually—the guy on the door was usually, uh, Chuck, uh, who was a friend of mine, he married one of my friends, and uh, you know, it was a cool place. It was—I always felt comfortable, but not comfortable that I wanted to go there every night, you know? It would be like, [inaudible] I'd go over to there, but uh, it wasn't a place that I usually hung out in, you know? Uh, you know, it was pretty stinky in there [*Laughter*], you know, and you know it ran—now it's a nail salon, but back then it was, from where it is now, up into the nail salon. That was part of Stonewall, so it was deeper, wider, uh, and at times, the Bohemia, Stonewall, you know, a lot of the gay bars back then, every once in a while the Mafia would I

guess try to make a little bit more money from us, so they'd come up with this idea that you'd have a card [*Laughter*].

LEWIS: Specific to the bar? Or to get into the club?

TOOLE: Yeah [*Laughter*], yeah. So you know, I had this little blue card you know and I think it was like five dollars for the card and you'd flash the card to get in, you know, and you'd have to pay monthly dues. You know, they wouldn't do it for long, just enough to get some money back into the place, you know? And at one time, Stonewall had even a peekaboo hole, you know, like a regular speakeasy, you know? Who's there? You know? [*Laughter.*] You know? [*Laughter.*]

LEWIS: I'm curious, you know, all this activism happened after the riots that summer.

TOOLE: Right.

LEWIS: Did that cross-pollinate into your guys' lives? Like, did it affect your lives or was that sort of off the radar for you guys?

TOOLE: It was pretty much off the radar. I do remember the Mattachine Society, uh, coming into the park and asking us if we'd go to different places with them to protest and this and that, you know? And you know, I didn't even know if they were a part of the Mattachine Society, but that's what they said they were, you know, but the girls had to put women's clothes on and these guys—and it was like, we weren't doing that, you know? We lost everything because we wanted to be who we were, so we weren't going to go through that. Uh, I went to the Firehouse once.

LEWIS: For the Gay Activist Alliance Firehouse?

TOOLE: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I went there once when I got out of jail. And I think I stayed a couple of hours and I left and I didn't go back, you know? I can't remember why, but I remember going there, you



know? You know, white people. You know, most of my friends were people of color, you know? The ones I hung out with.

LEWIS: Were you around for any of the early like, Christopher Street Liberation Day Marches? Didn't that go to Washington Square Park?

TOOLE: I don't know. I don't remember it at all. I do remember, and I don't even know what year this is, but me and this girl I was with, Emily, *[knocks table]* who is gone now, uh, were on Twenty-fifth Street and Madison, and all these gay people were coming down *[Laughter]*, and they were telling us to join them, you know? But I was robbing cars *[Laughter]*. I was breaking into cars, and it was like I had no idea what they were but you know, looking back on things I can remember that, you know, but I don't know what year—I had no, you know, I was trying to survive, you know? Whether I was on heroin or amphetamines, you know, I did crack, you know? So I was pretty much left out of all news and all queerness except for the queers that I was with, and they had the same knowledge as I did—nothing, except trying to survive, you know?

## MISS MAJOR GRIFFIN-GRACY

*Activist Miss Major Griffin-Gracy participated in the Stonewall uprising and later worked with the Tenderloin AIDS Resource Center and Transgender, Gender Variant, and Intersex Justice Project. In her oral history interview she recounts the dangers faced by trans women in the 1960s and today, as well as the problems with definitive histories of Stonewall.*

### From New York City Trans Oral History Project Interview with Abram J. Lewis

AJ LEWIS: I wanted to work up to asking you about Stonewall. You hung out there a fair amount, right?

MISS MAJOR GRIFFIN-GRACY: Well yeah, it was a good place to go to after working. Because all the guys were there. All the johns were there. And the boys who hooked over on Fifth Avenue, they all could've advertised in some model magazine. They were all simply lovely. Or you couldn't be there. No average guy stood on no corner there long. Those boys would kick his ass and send him on his merry fucking way, so. But they were beauties and they would come there to spend their money, pick up one of the girls and stuff. Most of them were, I guess, bisexual guys . . . you know, so, it was kind of cool. They liked the girls, so they hung out with us a lot. Some drag queens and stuff would be there. And I think one of the things that was interesting is the way that the gay man treats us as transsexual women, they were doing the same thing to the drag queens, when the queens were in their attire to be feminine. When they were in their male attire, that same kind of bullshit wouldn't happen. Like grabbing your ass as you're walking through the crowd to get to the

stage or pulling your jockstrap or digging in your gap to pull your dick out, you know what I mean or reach into your bra and pinch your nipples or take your head and push it down like they're going to make you suck their dick. When that drag queen is not in her female attire, they don't do that shit to them. You know, so it's this whole misogyny thing that they're doing as guys that guys felt, even to this day, that they felt they could do as guys. With what's happening in the world now with women are taking their power back, that shit ain't gonna be happening anymore, you know. And yay! It took a long time to get to this, you know what I mean. From Bill Cosby on down, you know? And it's a thing that everybody did this shit because they all turned their head, you know? When I listen to this stuff that the people who worked around it go, "Oh, I never noticed!" Yeah, you did! You just knew not to say nothing. What are you going to do, say something, lose your job, your family is going to go hungry and stuff like that? So it's weird. *[Speaking to someone in the background: "Okay baby see you when you come back now."]*

LEWIS: But you found that Stonewall was pretty accepting?

GRIFFIN-GRACY: Being at Stonewall was just a good place to be. Accepting? Like most of the clubs at the time, they were Mafia-ran. So it was acceptable to them because of the money. In looking back and thinking about stuff, what people fail to realize is, my community is a cash-and-carry cow. 'Cause credit cards? The fuck are those to us? Checking account? No. You know, paycheck, tax return? None of that stuff meant anything to us. And we had to live and accept this and so being outside the law was the only way to be. And so having a place to go to, we're gonna spend cash. The doctors wanted our cash, to go to get work done, you had to pay cash. To get a hormone shot? You had to come with your cash. And it was like fifty dollars a shot. You need a shot a week unless you a greedy girl like some of my friends and I, then you went twice a week. And then you found different doctors 'cause the same doctor wouldn't give you a shot twice in a week. So we got together a list of doctors and

you'd have to mark off which doctor you went to, what day you went, what name you went to that doctor as, so you'd have a little file cabinet with index cards that you'd go through: "Oh it's Thursday, I'll go see Dr. Barber. Uh what time? Three thirty. Oh I'm Barbara. Okay where's Barbara's outfit?" [*Chuckles.*]

LEWIS: Did you—this is kind of random but did you ever know a doctor who went by "Rotten Ralph"? A couple of people have floated that name to me; it might have been a little later though. . . .

GRIFFIN-GRACY: I've heard that name, when I came back to New York and I don't remember . . .

LEWIS: He may have been later.

GRIFFIN-GRACY: Um, one of the doctors that I do know was horrible to girls was in California, called Dr. Brown.

LEWIS: Yeah, he's very notorious.

GRIFFIN-GRACY: And the funny thing about him is, the girl that he did to use as his, I don't know, promotional act . . . she was absolutely perfect. Her skin was beautiful; she could pass wherever she went. She was about five six to five seven, she had the most beautiful skin and hair to her shoulders. She was soft, her hands were small. She dressed appropriately, she had a great—she could wear a one-piece bathing suit and get by. She was absolutely the most beautiful little thing. And it was just her. Everybody else, he destroyed.

LEWIS: Yeah they called him "Butcher Brown" or "Tabletop Brown."

GRIFFIN-GRACY: Everybody was destroyed. I had two girls who went to him and uh, were never the same. Alicia, she stayed uh—after she got better she never came out of her apartment. And had everything brought in; we had to shop for her and bring her food and stuff and never saw the light of day. Wouldn't open a blind.

LEWIS: Yeah, that's horrible. He's in jail now.

GRIFFIN-GRACY: Should be dead.

LEWIS: I wanted to ask more about Stonewall and the other bars. Is there an example of a bar that was not accepting? What that would be like?

GRIFFIN-GRACY: None of those fag bars were accepting! "Not accepting," you so cute! Those motha-fuckers didn't want us within ten feet of their place.

LEWIS: They didn't let you in.

GRIFFIN-GRACY: Child! They had no time for us. To them, we're like the scourge of the earth. You know, I might as well be the black plague, you know, as a black bitch. Simply because they just weren't having it. And the few, the one or two black guys that they would tolerate were just, either super built or super fine. And into the leather scene. And it's like, when you see one of them dressed from afar, you've seen them all: the work boots, the jeans, rolled up at the cuff, plaid shirt. Oh makes me sick, have you no style of your own? Have you thought about moccasins? You know, you get to know them, "My first name is Robert." Get them home, "My know my close friends call me Barbara." What?! What's with you? You're not going to lead me on these false pretenses! The thing is though, I don't know why it is, it's just that it's always been. And this division within the alphabet soup thing, has been there, from what I can tell, from time immemorial. Lesbians don't wanna deal with fags, fags don't wanna deal with the lesbians, bisexual guys don't want to deal with d's, butch lesbians don't want to be bothered with trans men and it's just a big mess instead of . . . once AIDS came along and the government came up with this umbrella that they stuck everybody under, everybody under that umbrella didn't necessarily belong there. But that's what they did and, and it helped with funding, yeah, yeah, yeah. But you can't help transgender women and label

them men, MSM—men who sleep with men. Really? No. My having a dick ain't got nothing to do with my womanhood! Bitch, get over it! Know what I mean, but there's no room for that because their brain can't conceive of this. I was doing a speech somewhere, lately and was talking about the kind of shit fags were putting us through and some gay guy in the audience was like "You can't call us fags anymore, we're gay." I said, "Sit your little faggoty gay ass down, let me tell you something, you all have been giving my community shit for so long, I'm telling you you are a fag. Now if that ain't enough for you, go to England, buy one and smoke it and then bring your fag-ass back over here." *[Chuckles.]*

LEWIS: So the experience was generally bad?

GRIFFIN-GRACY: Yes, pretty much. *[Chuckles.]* Pretty, pretty much you know. There's only so much you can do, to change it, you know; it's people being all hopped up and happy over Stonewall, yeah that's okay, that's really nice. But having been there and getting my ass knocked out, why wasn't it better for my community afterwards? Why all of a sudden were we still like rugs to the rest of the community? Why was everybody steppin' on our shoulders and our backs and going, "We're the ones that did this"? Really? Where's the respect? And I'm not asking for people to jump up and idolize and adore us; I'm just asking you to see the reality here. Who went to this club? The fags aren't going in and out of it, they had what? Ninety million clubs all over the Village. You know you could just stop for a minute and open up a bottle of beer and there was a gay club, what is this? We didn't have that liberty. There were only a few places we could go to and don't want to go to a dance club, oh God! With the snortin' of the whatever that shit was in, uh, tubes for asthma and stuff and dancin' around off of meth! We weren't allowed in there. And if you went in there and they found you? They would ask you to leave. You know, and not all gay guys are horrible gay guys. I have one or two gay guys that I know, have known for years and they are decent people, decent people. And they'll, you know, "Come with me to my bar" when I come to visit them. And

I've been in that bar with them, we may be sitting at the bar talking and having a drink and the bartender will come over and tell me, "We have to ask you to leave the bar because a couple of the patrons in the back are complaining about your perfume." "Well that's really nice, honey, but I'm not wearing any." So they didn't complain about that guy sitting next to him in his Polo shit and leave me alone. Oh and then they call the bouncer. And my friend and I have to leave. That's accepting? No. And agencies do the same thing: "Oh, we do transgender services." Oh yeah, a transgender girl could come in there, slap them in the face, they still wouldn't know what she was. Or tell her, "Sit down over there and somebody will be with you." It's ten o'clock in the morning, five thirty, "Nope, gotta go, you should come back tomorrow. The person that you needed to see didn't come in today." That's transgender services. That's fair and honest and caring treatment? No. No. So I do my best to fight and bitch about that shit and there's no pleasant way to go about doing that. They just don't see, they don't feel, they don't care.

LEWIS: I'd like to ask you more about transgender services, more recently. But I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the Stonewall Riots and what that was like.

GRIFFIN-GRACY: You know what? It was scary; it was something that happened all the time, where the police come in and are shutting down bars. And it happened all across the United States, not just New York, everywhere. They come, take that nightstick, hit the door down, the lights come on and you're streamed out. That's the routine, that's what they did, everybody knew it. Uh, they checked for ID to see if minors were in the bar. And the routine started but nobody would budge, everyone would just look at each other. And when we got our nerves together and everybody decide "Okay, we're going to go out," a fight ensued and all this crap that I've been hearing through the years: "Oh someone threw a shoe, someone threw a Molotov cocktail, someone did something else, someone slugged a cop." I don't know what happened! All I know is, a fight ensued. And we were kickin' their ass. So much so, they backed into

the bar for protection. And then the next thing you knew, the riot squad was there and then it was on. And I had learned from some friends in Chicago, if you're ever in a situation with a cop, do something to piss him off enough to knock you out. 'Cause if they don't knock you out, they will continue to beat your ass till they break bones in your body. Hit a rib, if they puncture your lung, you die. So I spit in his—snatched this cop's mask, spit in his face, he knocked my black ass out. And he dragged me to the fucking truck and threw my ass in there. But I'm still here. It was a mess. And the interesting thing was it went on for days, wasn't just one night, "Oh Stonewall, that one"—it went on for three or four days. It, it went on. And the funny thing was I remember hearing in my head people yelling from their apartments, "The girls are kicking the cops' asses over at Stonewall!" Well y'all weren't down there fighting! You were yelling from the fucking safety of your window, while we were getting brutalized, you know, down there. But when a parade came, couldn't find us anywhere! And I forget the name of that child that had the blue Cadillac, you know some little right white boy that buys the blue Cadillac, that was always by Stonewall. But um, in his car, in the parade, was a couple of the drag queens that he used to like, that performed. None of my girls! You know, Sylvia wasn't—I didn't see Sylvia there, in the front, where she should've been. And it's not about me—I don't give a shit whether they acknowledge or know about me—I mean, it has to do with, Sylvia and Marsha were trying to take care of the community before we really knew that we needed to be taken care of. They had a vision, they saw what was coming. And they did their best to protect us. To make us aware of it. And so, my involvement with them was always occasional. Because of the era and the times—I was an uptown girl. I lived up in the Eighties off of Amsterdam. They were Village girls. And the girls in the West or East Village were the East Village girls. And there were Harlem girls. And so, even though we all had some interconnection through somebody, they really fought to stabilize us. And so it behind that it became a matter of what do we do to keep this going. You know, to maintain it. I didn't know a thing about that fucking parade till I saw it on TV. Someone should've



told us, or made us aware of what was going on. You know and it was just, it was a hard pill to swallow. And one of the things, as a black person I learned that history is one big lie. It has to do with the person that's writing it, not the facts that went on. And perception plays ninety percent part in what that asshole puts down on paper. So, why believe it . . . or get involved? One of the things I think about is if you were to take a history book and pull the bullshit out of it, find the truth, snatch out all the bullshit that's in there, then you're going to wind up with two or three pages. All that 475,376 pages is crap. It's smoke that they're blowing up people's ass. And the sad thing is, people are buying it. If they don't buy it then that shit doesn't get [inaudible]. So it's a thing of making sure that you know, I'm not gonna lie to my girls [inaudible]. If you ask me something I'm gonna tell you the truth, you know. And it has to do with my perception of things, not theirs or what someone else has said. They aren't me. They weren't in my skin at that time. They didn't perceive anything that I perceived. And yeah, I'm older and yeah memory adds stuff or takes away stuff. Well that's just what it fuckin' does. I'm still here and fuck you.

# AFTER STONEWALL

## MARTHA SHELLEY

*Writer and activist Martha Shelley was a leader of the New York chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis in the 1960s and a member of the Gay Liberation Front and Radicalesbians after Stonewall. In this piece written for GLF's magazine, Come Out!, Shelley lays out the new confrontational politics of gay liberation: "The function of the homosexual is to make you uneasy."*

### From "Gay Is Good"

Look out, straights. Here comes the Gay Liberation Front, springing up like warts all over the bland face of Amerika, causing shudders of indigestion in the delicately balanced bowels of the movement. Here come the gays, marching with six-foot banners to Washington and embarrassing the liberals, taking over Mayor Alioto's office, staining the good names of War Resisters League and Women's Liberation by refusing to pass for straight anymore.

We've got chapters in New York, San Francisco, San Jose, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Wisconsin, Detroit and I hear maybe even in Dallas. We're gonna make our own revolution because we're sick of revolutionary posters which depict straight he-man types and earth mothers, with guns and babies. We're sick of the Panthers lumping us together with the capitalists in their term of universal contempt—"faggot."

And I am personally sick of liberals who say they don't care who sleeps with whom, it's what you do outside of bed that counts. This is what homosexuals have been trying to get straights to understand for years. Well, it's too late for liberalism. Because what I do outside of bed may have nothing to do with what I do inside—but my consciousness is branded, is permeated with homosexuality. For

years I have been branded with *your* label for me. The result is that when I am among gays or in bed with another woman, I am a person, not a lesbian. When I am observable to the straight world, I become gay. You are my litmus paper.

We want something more now, something more than the tolerance you never gave us. But to understand that, you must understand who we are.

We are the extrusions of your unconscious mind—your worst fears made flesh. From the beautiful boys at Cherry Grove to the aging queens in the uptown bars, the taxi-driving dykes to the lesbian fashion models, the hookers (male and female) on 42nd Street, the leather lovers . . . and the very ordinary very un-lurid gays . . . we are the sort of people everyone was taught to despise—and now we are shaking off the chains of self-hatred and marching on your citadels of repression.

Liberalism isn't good enough for us. And we are just beginning to discover it. Your friendly smile of acceptance—from the safe position of heterosexuality—isn't enough. As long as you cherish that secret belief that you are a little bit better because you sleep with the opposite sex, you are still asleep in your cradle and we will be the nightmare that awakens you.

We are women and men who, from the time of our earliest memories, have been in revolt against the sex-role structure and nuclear family structure. The roles we have played amongst ourselves, the self-deceit, the compromises and the subterfuges—these have never totally obscured the fact that we exist outside the traditional structure—and our existence threatens it.

Understand this—that the worst part of being a homosexual is having to keep it secret. Not the occasional murders by police or teenage queer-beaters, not the loss of jobs or expulsion from schools or dishonorable discharges—but the daily knowledge that what you are is so awful that it cannot be revealed. The violence against us is sporadic. Most of us are not affected. But the internal violence of being made to carry—or choosing to carry—the load of your straight society's unconscious guilt—this is what tears us apart,

what makes us want to stand up in the offices, in the factories and schools and shout out our true identities.

We were rebels from our earliest days—somewhere, maybe just about the time we started to go to school, we rejected straight society—unconsciously. Then, later, society rejected us, as we came into full bloom. The homosexuals who hide, who play it straight or pretend that the issue of homosexuality is unimportant, are only hiding the truth from themselves. They are trying to become part of a society that they rejected instinctively when they were five years old, to pretend that it is the result of heredity, or a bad mother, or anything but a gut reaction of nausea against the roles forced on us.

If you are homosexual, and you get tired of waiting around for the liberals to repeal the sodomy laws, and begin to dig yourself—and get angry—you are on your way to being a radical. Get in touch with the reasons that made you reject straight society as a kid (remembering my own revulsion against the vacant women drifting in and out of supermarkets, vowing never to live like them) and realize that you were *right*. Straight roles stink.

And you straights—look down the street, at the person whose sex is not readily apparent. Are you uneasy? Or are you made more uneasy by the stereotype gay, the flaming faggot or diesel dyke? Or most uneasy by the friend you thought was straight—and isn't? We want you to be uneasy, be a little less comfortable in your straight roles. And to make you uneasy, we behave outrageously—even though we pay a heavy price for it—and our outrageous behavior comes out of our rage.

But what is strange to you is natural to us. Let me illustrate. The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) “liberates” a gay bar for the evening. We come in. The people already there are seated quietly at the bar. Two or three couples are dancing. It's a down place. And the GLF takes over. Men dance with men, women with women, men with women, everyone in circles. No roles. You ever see that at a straight party? Not men with men—this is particularly verboten. No, and you're not likely to, while the gays in the movement are still passing for straight in order to keep up the good names of their organizations or

to keep up the pretense that they are acceptable—and to have to get out of the organization they worked so hard for.

True, some gays play the same role-games among themselves that straights do. Isn't every minority group fucked over by the values of the majority culture? But the really important thing about being gay is that you are forced to notice how much sex-role differentiation is pure artifice, is nothing but a game.

Once I dressed up for an American Civil Liberties Union benefit. I wore a black lace dress, heels, elaborate hairdo and makeup. And felt like—a drag queen. Not like a woman—I am a woman every day of my life—but like the ultimate in artifice, a woman posing as a drag queen.

The roles are beginning to wear thin. The makeup is cracking. The roles—breadwinner, little wife, screaming fag, bulldyke, James Bond—are the cardboard characters we are always trying to fit into, as if being human and spontaneous were so horrible that we each have to pick on a character out of a third-rate novel and try to cut ourselves down to its size. And you cut off your homosexuality—and we cut off our heterosexuality.

Back to the main difference between us. We gays are separate from you—we are alien. You have managed to drive your own homosexuality down under the skin of your mind—and to drive us down and out into the gutter of self-contempt. We, ever since we became aware of being gay, have each day been forced to internalize the labels: “I am a pervert, a dyke, a fag, etc.” And the days pass, until we look at you out of our homosexual bodies, bodies that have become synonymous and consubstantial with homosexuality, bodies that are no longer bodies but labels: and sometimes we wish we were like you, sometimes we wonder how you can stand yourselves.

It's difficult for me to understand how you can dig each other as human beings—in a man-woman relationship—how you can relate to each other in spite of your sex roles. It must be awfully difficult to talk to each other, when the woman is trained to repress what the man is trained to express, and vice-versa. Do straight men and women talk to each other? Or does the man talk and the woman

nod approvingly? Is love possible between heterosexuals; or is it all a case of women posing as nymphs, earth-mothers, sex-objects, what-have-you; and men writing the poetry of romantic illusions to these walking stereotypes?

I tell you, the function of a homosexual is to make you uneasy.

And now I will tell you what we want, we radical homosexuals: not for you to tolerate us, or to accept us, but to understand us. And this you can do only by becoming one of us. We want to reach the homosexuals entombed in you, to liberate our brothers and sisters, locked in the prisons of your skulls.

We want you to understand what it is to be our kind of outcast—but also to understand our kind of love, to hunger for your own sex. Because unless you understand this, you will continue to look at us with uncomprehending eyes, fake liberal smiles; you will be incapable of loving us.

We will never go straight until you go gay. As long as you divide yourselves, we will be divided from you—separated by a mirror trick of your mind. We will no longer allow you to drop us—or the homosexuals in yourselves—into the reject bin; labeled sick, childish or perverted. And because we will not wait, your awakening may be a rude and bloody one. It's your choice. You will never be rid of us, because we reproduce ourselves out of your bodies—and out of your minds. We are one with you.

## KARLA JAY

*Karla Jay is a former member of the Gay Liberation Front and Radicalesbians. She coedited the groundbreaking anthology Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation with Allen Young and has made major contributions to LGBTQ scholarship. In this passage from her memoir, Tales of the Lavender Menace, Jay remembers the Lavender Menace action in 1970 that protested homophobia in the National Organization for Women.*

### *From Tales of the Lavender Menace*

When we finished the manifesto, we had to decide what to call ourselves. We rejected lavender herring because we didn't want to denigrate ourselves, even in jest. We settled on Lavender Menace as a provisional name for the group.

I was part of the contingent that planned the logistics of the Lavender Menace action. Ironically, Michela and I had honed these organizational skills working with Susan Brownmiller on the *Ladies' Home Journal* action, and now here we were protesting something she had written. Several Menaces hand-dyed T-shirts in a bathtub. Then they silk-screened enough purple T-shirts with the words "Lavender Menace" for the entire group. No two shirts looked exactly alike; the color of each depended on how long it had been in the tub. All the shirts were the same size, however, since we could afford only one box. We also made up a number of placards. We decided to go for a humorous approach, since we knew some women were going to be shocked (or perhaps delighted) to discover themselves completely surrounded by lesbians, especially as we had just been dismissed as a minute faction of the movement. The posters, written in rose-colored ink, blared a variety of messages:



TAKE A LESBIAN TO LUNCH!

SUPERDYKE LOVES YOU!

WOMEN'S LIBERATION IS A LESBIAN PLOT.

WE ARE YOUR WORST NIGHTMARE, YOUR BEST FANTASY.

Finally, we were ready. The Second Congress to Unite Women got under way on May 1 at 7:00 P.M. at Intermediate School 70 on West Seventeenth Street in Manhattan. About three hundred women filed into the school auditorium. Just as the first speaker came to the microphone, Jesse Falstein, a GLF member, and Michela switched off the lights and pulled the plug on the mike. (They had cased the place the previous day and knew exactly where the switches were and how to work them.) I was planted in the middle of the audience, and I could hear my coconspirators running down both aisles. Some were laughing, while others were emitting rebel yells. When Michela and Jesse flipped the lights back on, both aisles were lined with seventeen lesbians wearing their Lavender Menace T-shirts and holding the placards we had made. Some invited the audience to join them. I stood up and yelled, "Yes, yes, sisters! I'm tired of being in the closet because of the women's movement." Much to the horror of the audience, I unbuttoned the long-sleeved red blouse I was wearing and ripped it off. Underneath, I was wearing a Lavender Menace T-shirt. There were hoots of laughter as I joined the others in the aisles. Then Rita yelled to members of the audience, "Who wants to join us?"

"I do; I do," several replied.

Then Rita also pulled off her Lavender Menace T-shirt. Again, there were gasps, but underneath she had on another one. More laughter. The audience was on our side.

By the time the street theater portion of our action was over, about forty Menaces plus audience members who spontaneously joined the action were in the aisles. We passed out mimeographed copies of "The Woman-Identified Woman" and stormed onto the stage. Michela turned the microphone back on. We explained how

angry we were to have been excluded from the planning and content of the conference. We wanted our issues and voices included in the congress.

At first one or two members of the planning committee tried to restore order and return to the original program. But not only were these women completely outnumbered by the forty or so members of our action, who now stood on the stage with our arms in solidarity around one another's shoulders, but also the audience was backing us. Audience members indicated via applause or boos that they wanted the lesbian issue to remain on the floor. Some of the straight women turned out to be very supportive. One stood up and said: "Wow, I really need to hear this tonight. I thought I could put off dealing with my feelings for a woman for at least two more years." That statement struck a chord with many of the other nonlesbians in the audience.

Since the panel scheduled for that evening was clearly not happening, women from the audience began to walk up to the microphone. They initiated a dialog with us and with other members of the audience. Pleased with this unexpected openness, we decided that the discussion should continue. When we spotted Marlene Sanders filming the zap for WABC-TV, a Menace stole her film. We wanted the exchange to be free and unfettered. At the end of the speak-out several members of the Lavender Menace, including me, agreed to run workshops the next day on the topic of heterosexism.

Although the Second Congress to Unite Women is best remembered for the Lavender Menace action, there were two other groups that joined us in expressing their dissatisfaction with the event. Black women and members of a class workshop used the stage and then workshops to address how the conference reflected racism and classism in the Women's Liberation Movement. An anonymous author wrote in *Rat* about the confusion of some audience members at the conference: "They were so used to dealing with women's liberation . . . from the shelter of their status as educated, secure, white privileged women. Suddenly, they had to consider why other women hadn't wanted to stay with them, hadn't

wanted to play their game.” So much discussion made me hopeful. For a short time after the congress, I was naive enough to believe that the middle-class, straight, white women might actually change.

For lesbians, the best thing that emerged from the Lavender Menace action was the group of protesters itself—the first post-Stonewall group to focus on lesbian issues. Only weeks earlier, we had been a random group of women associated primarily with gay liberation and women’s liberation. For the moment at least, we emerged a victorious organization with a sense of solidarity, common purpose, and sisterhood. We knew we would no longer accept second-class status in the women’s movement or the gay movement. We would be equal partners, or we would leave the straight women and gay men behind.

For a while we hotly debated what to call ourselves. At one point we even called ourselves Radical Radishes because so many of our members were red (Marxist) on the outside but white (capitalist) within. Pat Maxwell, who had been in the GLF, made a button featuring two intertwined radishes with women’s symbols emerging from their root end. Eventually, we settled on the name “Radicalesbians” in one uninterrupted word that underscored our unity.

Our only regret about that weekend was that Betty Friedan and Susan Brownmiller, the two women whose words had spurred us to action, were not present. We knew, however, that in a movement as small as ours word of the Lavender Menace would reach them in a matter of hours. We felt as well that the zap was only the first of many actions to come and that lesbian liberation was suddenly and unstoppably on the rise.

## STEVEN F. DANSKY

*Steven F. Dansky is an activist, writer, and photographer who was a member of the Gay Liberation Front and a founder of Effeminism, a movement of profeminist men. He is a frequent contributor to the Gay and Lesbian Review, and his essays have been extensively anthologized. His project Outspoken: Oral History from LGBTQ Pioneers is a collection of interviews archived at ONE: National Gay and Lesbian Archives. He wrote and directed a full-length film, From Trauma to Activism. This essay was originally published in Rat, an underground newspaper after it had been taken over by W.I.T.C.H and other feminist groups—later republished in Come Out! and Gay Flames. The essay is a critique of sexism in male-dominated movements.*

### “Hey Man”

Every man growing up in this culture is programmed to systematically oppress, dehumanize, objectify and rape women. A man's cock, a biological accident, becomes the modus operandi by which a male child is bestowed with power by this culture. A mere couple of inches of flesh places this male child in a position above half the human race and there is no man who does not benefit and glorify in the power inherent in this birth right. Every expression of manhood is a reassertion of this cock privilege. All men are male supremacists. Gay men are no exception to the maxim.

The ability to express homosexuality, however, carries with it a severe penalty in our culture because of the nature of the taboo placed upon homosexuality by this male-dominated heterosexual society. Straight men abhor homosexuality because of their inability and inadequacy when it comes to expressing love for another man. Heterosexual men are driven to abuse women because they can't directly express the love they have for each other. They literally fuck

their friends' women because they are unable to fuck their friend. This observation has been born of the experience of most women in the communal situation in the hip counter-culture.

Homosexuality is a manifestation of the breaking down of male roles. This "unacceptable" affront to conventional manhood forces male straight society up against the wall; so much so that they must suppress, repress and oppress all signs of a life-giving homosexuality and force it into their warped death-dealing definitions. Their task, then, becomes a bludgeoning of homosexuality into parodistic expressions within this culture. Gay men are violently driven toward a false goal: the mutation of homosexuality into a male heterosexual personae. This results in the constant struggle of gay men to fit themselves into a heterosexual ideation of manhood. The gay man is asked to love, emulate, and worship his oppressor. The oppression gay men suffer has shown the validity and absolute necessity for a struggle for gay liberation. We have begun in our struggle for liberation to reject the internalization of this male heterosexual identity. Gay men must examine all forms of their homosexuality and be suspicious of all of them because the ways we express homosexuality have been molded by male supremacy. The gay liberation struggle will not reach beyond the civil libertarian goals of the homophile movement until it can see how deeply ingrained and oppressive is this idealization of male heterosexuality within each of us.

As was suggested by both Robin Morgan and Rita Mae Brown in their RAT articles, Gay Liberation Front men have avoided the questions of male supremacy, as if they were exempt. Indeed, it is the most crucial question relevant to any struggle for gay liberation. Male homosexuality could be the first attempt at the non-assertion of cultural manhood. It could be the beginning of the process by which we can reach a gender redefinition of Man: the "non-man." Homosexuality from this standpoint is the first step in the process of "de-manning." The men of G.L.F. have instead consistently asserted their manhood resulting in an attempt to stifle the struggle of women to free themselves from the shackles of male domination. What is worse is that G.L.F. men have further used the presence of

women to legitimize their homosexuality. An examination of G.L.F. results in the conclusion that the gay men are no less afraid of each other than are straight men without “their women.” What is pervasive in G.L.F. is a resistance to examining our sexual repression, inhibition and puritanism. If sexuality is expressed it is done behind closed doors. G.L.F. men have dutifully continued to use The Man’s exploitative institutions, which are designed to keep us in our oppression. To be blunt, we have accepted The Man’s roles and go to him to get laid. One of the goals of G.L.F. is the establishment of a community center. The community center is proposed as an alternative to these exploitative institutions. But haven’t we avoided the alternative which already exists in each of us? We can’t wait for a building as if it, a pile of bricks, was the answer to our oppression. We have been kept in isolation, we have been oppressed, exploited, and our identity has been taken from us. We have been told how to be gay and where to go to express it. It is no accident that we have been forced into the Gay Liberation Front to fight. Our homosexuality can be a revolutionary tool only if we abandon our self-destructive attempts to fit the warped roles given us by the male heterosexual system. The fear that one might be thought homosexual by another man—this fear is a powerful goad keeping men, both homosexual and heterosexual, in line as the oppressors of women. It is one of the many ways that men hold on to their privileges derived from oppression. Our task lies before us: our goal is stopping the propagation of the male heterosexual ethos by any means necessary.

Another project of Gay Liberation Front is the holding of dances. This is supposed to be an alternative to the bars. At the dances we have used women as pawns, rejoicing in our heterosexual experimentation. We are not proud of the fact that women don’t feel like sex objects around gay men. Our omnipresent male flesh and how we throw it around have made women see the necessity of having separate dances. Gay men, you can fuck women. It’s male straight society that categorizes you, and tells you what you can and cannot do. But that’s not the point. We are sexual beings, but at present, male sexuality is the means by which we both fuck and

fuck over women. At the dances G.L.F. men have tolerated the presence of straight men who have come with their tongues and cocks dangling, ready to show G.L.F. women that all lesbians need is a good lay. All the pornographic material certainly suggests that heterosexual men, believe it or not, get a charge out of female homosexuality. Playboy even promotes what they call Bisexuality in women—but not in men.

G.L.F. men have subverted the obvious: that is, lesbianism in practice is exclusive of men. That puts men uptight, whether they be gay or straight. G.L.F. men have forced themselves upon lesbians, who because of the oppression they suffer from men, have realized that the only possible means of obtaining equality is in relationship with other women. That is why women, from G.L.F., from the women's bars, or the women's movement, don't come to our male dominated G.L.F. dances—they are overwhelmed by our male presence and either leave at the door or are forced to elbow their way through, attempting to find other women.

G.L.F. men have either avoided or attacked the most important movement in the world today: the struggle for the liberation of women. Any organization which does not recognize this struggle is objectively counter-revolutionary. We have fought male supremacy in every one of our relationships with men. We should know what women are talking about. In order to join the struggle for women's liberation, we as gay men must relinquish all power in G.L.F. to the women. We must give them final veto power. Until G.L.F. men join the struggle, we will either drive the women out or continue to subvert them, thus becoming the young, hip, counter-culture version of the Mattachine Society. It is in the interests, however, of G.L.F. to join this struggle. Combating male supremacy, in ourselves and in other men, is in fact at the very heart—or should be—of our struggle against our oppression.

The commitment needed for a struggle for liberation carries with it heavy demands. We must begin to make demands on each male G.L.F. member. G.L.F. must demand the complete negation of the use of gay bars, tearooms, trucks, baths, streets, and other traditional cruising institutions. These are exploitative institutions

designed to keep gay men in the roles given to them by a male heterosexual system. The use of these institutions by G.L.F. men must be seen as copping out to The Man's oppression of homosexuals.

In order that we fight our oppressor we must band together in living collectives. It will be the task of each Revolutionary Male Homosexual (RMH) collective to examine and confront the romantic notions with which we have been programmed to accept. Each RMH collective will have at least three men but no more than twelve. Within the RMH collective we will reject our parody of male heterosexual society's pairing off. We will instead begin to remould our homosexuality by developing a communistic sexuality of sharing, cooperation, selflessness, and total community. Our commitment to fight for gay liberation will be the means by which we can devise the necessary tactics for the destruction of all exploitative gay institutions and of all male supremacist institutions. Our recognition of male heterosexuality as our oppressor will mean that we will have to confront every male heterosexual with whom we come into contact.

The RMH collective will take on the responsibility of adopting and raising male homeless children. We will attempt to raise these children so that they do not acquire the male supremacist ideation of manhood. The RMH collective will fight all brutalizing versions of homosexuality as existed in other cultures such as Athens or Rome, that now exist in prisons. We will stop the army's exploitation of homosexuality, natural to men, as a means of making men kill. We will stop the brutalization of gay men by straight trade.

At the G.L.F. dances we have danced the circle dance as a show of community. Our circle dance is the ritual—an orgy of discharged energy—before we enter the struggle. We in our circle dance have felt our sensibilities surge close to the surface. With acute aggressiveness we have encircled ourselves with protection against our oppressor. The time has now come to move out. Gay people will no longer be oppressed. We are angry at the theft of our identity.



We will collectively recapture what we know is ours and has been taken from us.

We are backed to the wall. There is no turning back. Our rage will no longer eat at our bowels. We have seen who has done it. We can feel him, identify him. At the Firehouse old RAT men called a meeting with the community to devise with community support tactics by which they could sabotage the RAT women's collective. At the Firehouse I met my oppressor. I met The Man. My "brothers" in the movement. They pleaded: "Don't be divisive. Work with me for the revolution." But it is a revolution born of their discontent: it is a Man revolution. The Man revolution with women to fuck, bear their children, lick their wounds, and cook their meals. Faggots to be put away. They are the same men who put me behind barbed wire in Cuba. They watched me peek out at what I had fought alongside of them for; what I had died with them for. They are the same white supremacists who told blacks they had gone too far. They didn't give up their white skin privileges. Instead they waited for blacks to come home. But blacks didn't come home to Mastah Man and neither will women. That night RAT men called the women fascists and spelt the women's Rat collective with a K. But RAT men we know you are Amerika. You are not revolutionaries but the capitalist ideal of rugged individualism. Women and gay people will stop your revolution. It is male counterrevolution.

I don't want your help, understanding, or sympathy. I can recognize that, your male supremacist jive. Your love is oppression; it means bondage. I will fight the capitalists; that is inevitable. Capitalism is another word for male supremacy. You, movement heterosexual man . . . Man, you are the ruling class. Hey Man, are you fighting to keep your inherited power. Listen Man, give it up or go under. Your universe is being smashed. Your fantasy is being challenged. My soul won't be cast-ironed out by your drunken raps. A timing of barricades will come: on which side will you be?

# HARRY HAY

*Harry Hay cofounded the Mattachine Society in Los Angeles in 1950, one of the first gay rights groups in the United States. In the 1970s he was a leader of the Los Angeles chapter of the Gay Liberation Front. He later cofounded the gay liberation movement the Radical Faeries. Hay's "Statement of Purpose" for the Los Angeles GLF shows how broad their political agenda was and connections between gay liberation and the earlier homophile movement.*

## From *Radically Gay*

### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE—GAY LIBERATION FRONT, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

**History:** 1969 was the Year of the New Homosexual. During that year new groups, projecting a militant, activist, and determined viewpoint, began to spring up around the country: Committee for Homosexual Freedom, San Francisco; Gay Liberation Front, New York; Gay Liberation Front, Berkeley; Gay Liberation Front, Minneapolis—new ones every week, with the current count at twenty-five. During December 1969, Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles, was founded.

**Community of Interest:** We are in total opposition to America's white racism, to poverty, hunger, the systematic destruction of our patrimony; we oppose the rich getting richer, the poor getting poorer, and are in total opposition to wars of aggression and imperialism, whoever pursues them. We support the demands of Blacks, Chicanos, Orientals, Women, Youth, Senior Citizens, and others demanding their full rights as human beings. We join in their struggle, and shall actively seek coalition to pursue these goals.

**General Methodology:** Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles, will be a one-human, one-vote, non-exclusionary organization, welcoming all concerned homosexuals and sexual liberationists into its association. Decision-making process is by consensus. There is no formal membership; participants are called “Associates.” Meetings are weekly, on Sunday at 4:00 p.m. Until further notice we are meeting in the offices of the Homosexual Information Center, as their guests. A future project will be to establish a working center.

**Philosophy:** We say that homosexuality is a perfectly natural state, a fact, a way of life, and that we enjoy our sexuality, without feelings of inferiority or guilt. We seek and find love, and approach love, as a feeling of loving mutuality. We refuse to engage in discussion of causation, “Sickness” (A LIE!), degrees of sexuality, or any other such Establishment Hang-Ups. We accept ourselves with total self-respect, and respect our associates as they are, not what some social arbiter says they should be.

**Self-liberation:** One of our foremost goals is to bring all sexual beings into total acceptance of their sexuality. We believe that homosexuals can best serve themselves by accepting the total naturalness of their homosexuality. We believe that, as quickly as possible, homosexuals should find ways to inform their friends, families, employers, and associates of their homosexuality, that through this confrontation might come freedom from gossip, blackmail, guilt feelings, and self-destruction.

**Education:** We shall as quickly as possible inform one another of our knowledge of life, and then take that knowledge out into the community to educate the Philistines who have for so long made life in America a petrified, joyless Puritanism.

**Action:** We shall go immediately and militantly to the defense of one another and any homosexual deprived of his [sic] right to a joyful, useful, and personal life. Street actions are now being organized, more will come; we shall not waste our energies, however, on irrelevant issues. Our goal is—*total liberation—life is for the living! We are alive! We want all to be alive! Sex is a sure*

*cure of boredom and an antidote to the violence that is so American*

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((((( ((( ( ( ( Power to the People ) ) ) ) ) ) ) ) ) ) )

*Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles*

Adopted December 1969.

## REV. TROY D. PERRY

*Reverend Troy Perry founded the Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) in 1968—the first Christian denomination to affirm the lives of LGBTQ people. In his memoir, *The Lord Is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay*, Perry recounts his civil disobedience after the march that was held in Los Angeles in 1970 to coincide with the Christopher Street Liberation Day march in New York commemorating the first anniversary of Stonewall.*

### *From *The Lord Is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay**

We had exactly two days to throw a parade together. Every gay organization in town wanted to participate, but no one was really prepared. None thought we'd ever get the permit. Once we had it, we went into action. I don't know where all the paraphernalia of the floats and parade exhibits came from, but a lot of runners must have run through garages, attics, display houses, costume houses, and who knows what all. It was decided to hold the parade with the various groups marching down Hollywood Boulevard from the assembly area near Hollywood and Highland Avenue. We would march east to Vine Street and then return to our starting point. No gay group or conglomeration of gay groups had ever gotten this far before.

As we were forming for the parade, we learned that our gay brothers and sisters in New York had failed to get their permit, and had to march on the sidewalks without any formation. We were exultant to learn that they had gone on and marched anyway to their Gay-In up in Central Park.

We couldn't get the bands we wanted to have, nor the horsemen, nor a lot of the floats, but we did exceptionally well anyway. The parade started with Willie Smith driving his VW Microbus, and playing some recordings of World War II German marches over an amplification system he had hooked up. Right behind him was the Society of Anubis, a social group of the hinterlands. They owned a retreat house out in the San Bernardino Mountains. And here they were, militant conservatives, going down Hollywood Boulevard with a float and the goddess of Anubis on a white stallion.

The alphabetical order was a little haphazard. Behind the Anubis section was *The Advocate* float bedecked with a carload of groovy guys in bikini swim suits. This was a mass of muscle calculated to turn everyone on. It did. After the male beauties, all fresh from their triumph at their annual contest, the parade ran the gamut of just about anything you could name. I think Focus was next. This is a pretty conservative gay group from extremely conservative Orange County. The Focus group carried a large sign reading "Homosexuals for Ronald Reagan." I heard one woman spectator on the sidewalk say, "I can forgive them for being homosexuals, but not for being for Ronald Reagan."

Gay Liberation came marching down the street carrying banners and shouting "Two, four, six, eight—gay is just as good as straight." That drew two kinds of comments from the sidewalk crowd. One was an enthusiastic echo; the other, derision. But the marchers were followed by the chilling spectacle of a Gay Lib float with a young beautiful man fastened on a cross. Above him a large black-and-white banner was emblazoned with the words "In Memory of Those Killed by the Pigs." Reaction to that was a silent shock wave that stunned and chilled all the spectators. To turn the mood back to the festive occasion there was also a Gay Lib Guerrilla Theatre. This was a flock of shrieking drag queens all wearing gauzy pastel dresses, and running every which way to escape club wielding guys dressed as cops and sporting large badges with the word "Vice" splashed across them.

Another organization marching with us was a group of friends carrying a large sign reading, "Heterosexuals for Homosexual

Freedom.” It was a direct, welcome, and reassuring gesture. This is happening oftener, but we need a lot more of it.

A fife and drum accompanied the flag. There were drag queens. One section that particularly amused me was the pet section. Pets were carried, led, and pushed; some were in cages, some in highly decorated cases. Topping that off, one fellow had a big white husky dog on a leash. He had a sign on his dog reading, “All of us don’t walk poodles.” There was a motorcycle group in black leather led by a butch young man resplendent in black leather jacket, pants, gloves, and dripping with chains that seemed to encrust his heavy costume. To set this off in a frolicsome mood he wore pink high-heeled shoes.

Pat Rocco’s group, SPREE (Society of Pat Rocco Enlightened Enthusiasts), had a large number of colorfully costumed people, many carrying SPREE signs and slogans about gay films. Several wildly decorated cars also carried SPREE girls and many handsome young men who had appeared in Pat’s films. The whole SPREE group was preceded by an enormous lavender banner that spelled out the SPREE name. Rocco is a close personal friend of mine. He is also the leading film maker in the gay community.

Signs carried in the parade were slogans that we now see with increasing frequency. Here are some samples: “Homosexuality Is Natural Birth Control”; “More Deviation, Less Population”; “America: In God We Trust . . . Love It But Change It”; “Nazis Burned Jews, Churches Burned Homosexuals”; “Hickory, Dickory, Dock, They’ll Pick Our Bedroom Lock, They’ll Haul Us In and Call It Sin, Unless We Stop Their Clock.”

We were the last in this smoothly run parade. I rode in an open convertible. Behind me came the congregation singing “Onward Christian Soldiers.” We were gay, and we were proud. We had come out of our closets and into the streets. We were applauded—I think it was for our courage, and a kind of recognition for what we were doing in the religious community. It was a moving experience. I meditated because I had some misgivings about what lay immediately ahead. After the parade I went to the corner of Hollywood Boulevard and Las Palmas Avenue. I intended to begin a

prayer-vigil and fast there. Prior to that, I had sent letters to Los Angeles Police Chief Davis and his administrative assistants to let them know my plans. I really didn't go there to be arrested. In the back of my mind there was always that chance that it could happen, but I really didn't think so. After all, the Krishna kids hadn't been arrested there. Neither had the Salvation Army people, nor any other religious group such as the gospel preachers and singers who have come out of Holiness churches and have gone there to preach, sing, solicit funds, and demonstrate. No theater manager had ever been arrested for having people three deep along the boulevard waiting to buy tickets or waiting to be admitted to his theater.

So I chose a convenient spot and sat down. After I sat there about thirty minutes, some police officers walked up, looked the situation over, and one said, "Did you know that you're breaking the law?"

I looked up and said, "No I don't know that."

"It's against the law to do what you're doing," the other officer said.

"Well, if it's against the law to sit on the sidewalk, then I presume I'm breaking the law."

They then asked me to get up and move along. I said, "Well, officers, I can't do that. I'm holding a prayer-vigil and fast as a protest against the laws that discriminate against homosexuals here in the state of California." They left.

But they came back twice more with the same request, and I gave them the same answer. Meanwhile, some of my friends and supporters were marching up and down to show their support and approval of the prayer-vigil and fast. They read prayers, sang hymns, and walked in an orderly manner. A sergeant from the Los Angeles Police Department came up, looked at my clerical collar, and said, "Now, you're not going to be arrested, but I want you to know that you are in violation of the law." I thought I was going to be left alone.

It looked like I might be there awhile. Willie Smith had his VW bus parked around the corner. Steve was there with my mother, and a few others. Willie had brought jugs of water, air mattresses, and sleeping bags. He was all set to see that we would be as comfortable



as possible. We settled in. Police cars would cruise slowly by, and I would see officers talking on their radios to headquarters. Then a fire truck went by, fairly close. My first thought was, God, they're going to use water hoses to clear the people off the street. I told everyone who stood around to please leave at once. I told Steve to take Mother to Willie's bus. I told Willie that if anything happened, I didn't want him or Steve to be on the scene to get busted. They'd have to be free to function. He, reluctantly, went to his bus.

Two women sat down with me. They insisted on joining me for the prayer-vigil and the fast. They said they would stick it out to the end. Willie provided them with water, blankets, and air mattresses, too. One of the women was from the Daughters of Bilitis. The other was from an organization called HELP, Incorporated. DOB is a nonviolent, but militant organization to aid lesbians in their fight for equal rights. HELP is the "Homophile Effort for Legal Protection."

Vigilant Morris Kight was there to help see that no violence occurred. Morris is a close personal friend of mine, one of my earliest supporters. He has been a civil rights activist since World War II. Most of his action has centered on gay civil rights. Not only was he a founder of Gay Liberation Front, he has been a prime mover in all gay rights action for nearly two decades. Seeing Morris come forward to help see that everything ran smoothly bolstered my courage.

My secretary was walking along in the group of supporters that was beginning to grow. I began to worry that the marching would stop and somebody would start something. My secretary was accompanied by two newspaper people, one was the then city editor of the *Hollywood Citizen News*, and the other was a charming and bright newspaperwoman from the same paper, who now writes for the *Los Angeles Times*. They were three abreast.

One police officer hailed my secretary, and I heard him shout to him, "Hey, you, come here!"

So, my secretary walked over, accompanied by his friends of the press, and he said, "Yes, officer?"

The officer said to them, "I'm talking to him. Who are you?" So they showed their press cards, and said they were covering this prayer-vigil and fast for the papers. The police officer's tone changed immediately. They asked him what he had to say. He replied, "You can only march two abreast!" So the city editor dropped behind.

When they passed me the next time, I stopped my secretary, and said, "I want you to get in the bus; I don't want you arrested. You'll have to be at the office to take care of the phones, the mail, and the general business. And I don't like the way things look around here. Try to have everyone keep moving, and not stop or bunch up. Pass that word as you leave." He did. And people began to leave and go away. The two girls and I talked about how smooth it all seemed to be going.

A police car rolled around the corner and stopped. Two policemen jumped out, came over and said, "You're all under arrest! Would you please come along peaceably and get into the car!" We stood up, walked over to the car, and got in the backseat. The doors were closed and locked. The officers got in the front. That made three of them up there. One radioed headquarters that they had picked us up, and that they hadn't had any trouble with any mob of any sort. One officer turned around and said, "If you promise not to try to jump out of the car, we won't handcuff you." By this time, we were really picking up speed on our way down the Boulevard.

"Don't worry. I won't try to jump out of this car or any that's doing sixty-five miles an hour. And neither will they. If anything should happen to us, people will know something went wrong, because we're not going to do anything violent. Period."

We were taken to the Hollywood police station at Wilcox Avenue, ushered up to the second floor and put into a room. We were there about ten minutes when a young police officer came in, sat down and began to talk to us. I think we discussed homosexuality with him for about three-quarters of an hour. He was most curious about us. He said that he'd never talked to homosexuals before, and he just didn't know what to think. This young man had been one of the arresting officers. A lieutenant from the force walked into the room,

and said that we were going to be released on our O. R. (own recognizance).

I told him that I couldn't go along with that. I said, "No, I'm not going to be released."

He looked at me very suspiciously and asked, "Don't you want to get back down to Hollywood Boulevard?"

"No, I don't. I presume you would just arrest me again. I'll just stay here."

He smiled and said, "Why? Do you think this will get you some sort of publicity? Do you think that'll help your cause?"

"Well, I'll stay here. You've already picked me up on Hollywood Boulevard and you'd probably only arrest me again. So, I'll go ahead and spend the night in jail tonight. I won't sign myself out."

They immediately withdrew the offer, and that went for the girls, too. Both of them had to work the next day, so they had to start the procedure of raising bail. We were separated. I was taken downstairs, immediately fingerprinted, photographed, and booked. They were very courteous. By now it was well after midnight.

The jail was clean, and it had the jailhouse smell—kind of stale sulphur, I guess, or some kind of disinfectant, that seeps through everything. The floors were scrubbed clean, and the bars were painted green. I was given a mattress and taken to my cell. The turnkey told me to flop on whatever bunk I wanted. There were two steel frames that protruded from the wall. They were suspended by chains at each end. There was a toilet bowl attached to the wall at the other end. There is something about having that heavy steel door of bars clang shut behind you, and the lock flop over. Suddenly, I felt very much alone. I tossed my mattress onto the cot, and I stood and looked up. The light shone right back in my eyes. I closed my eyes and asked God to guide me through this. Then I straightened out the mattress, took off my coat, folded it, and laid it neatly on the cot. I folded my hands and prayed for a long time. Then I lay down, put my coat over my head to shut out the light and fell off to a light and troubled sleep. The sounds of the jail, loud voices, occasional curses, the belligerence of a drunk, traffic noises, sirens and sometimes someone crying, often awakened me. The

emergency hospital was next door. The wailing siren and clanging bell sounds of an ambulance would crash into my brain. I would again say my prayers and doze off to sleep. Then I heard my own cell door open. I was getting a cellmate. He was a drunk. It was nearly four in the morning. The drunk took one look at my clerical collar, crossed himself and just stood there staring. I smiled, put my coat back over my head and fell back to sleep. The drunk just slumped down on the floor, huddled up and dozed. He snored so loudly that it was hard to fall back to sleep.

Then I heard a ruckus start in some other cell. I heard someone crying and screaming, "Don't, don't beat me." I jumped up. But I couldn't see anything. And then it was over. I could still hear the plaintive, whimpering sobs. My heart reached out to that poor soul. What had happened? I learned later that it was a young transvestite, determined to become a transsexual, who had been arrested for soliciting to perform a lewd act. This person had been thrown into a cell with other prisoners, and had been beaten up by them. The thing that was so horrible about it is that no one went to help him. The police just ignored him. It was the kind of indirect brutality that really galls me. They did nothing to him, but they refused to help him. Days later, I met the young person, and had a long heart-warming talk with him about his problems. Our church was able to help him in many ways: his court case, sexual orientation, job problems, but most important with friends.

I paced my cell, and prayed. I was offered breakfast, and I refused it because I was fasting. As soon as I refused that first meal, I was taken out of the cell and photographed again. I was taken to the front desk, and they put a new arm band on me. They took mine off, and I saw that the new one had the name of an individual I had never heard of. They also gave me a new booking number. That really scared me. I was sure that some strange game had started, and that I would be lost somewhere in the jail system of Los Angeles County or Los Angeles City, or traded back and forth.

"Say, this is a big mistake. This is the wrong name, and the wrong booking number."

They just laughed and said, “Oh, that’s okay, don’t worry, it doesn’t make any difference.”

No matter how much I protested, nothing penetrated their minds, nor their procedures. I was taken away and transferred immediately by car to the jail in the Highland Park–Lincoln Heights area. It is really a series of holding tanks with two jail divisions, fifty-eight and fifty-nine, for misdemeanor arraignments. The building was out on San Fernando Road, and it was fairly new. I was popped into a tank with about fifty other alleged criminals. One of them came up to me right away and said, “Father, what are you in for?”

I said, “I was nailed for being in a civil rights demonstration!” That did it. I was an instant hero. They crowded around me and shook hands. Most of them spoke Spanish. It’s that kind of neighborhood out there. Some came and spoke to me in Spanish, and I regretted that I couldn’t talk with them.

Finally, my case was called. I was led out and put in a small anteroom near the courtroom. I was approached by a public defender who asked if I had an attorney.

“No, not for today. I’ll serve as my own attorney. But, when I go to trial, I’ll have private counsel.”

“You know that they’re not going to let you out on your O. R. today? You should have taken that yesterday.”

I just laughed and said, “Well, if they don’t let me out, I’ll just stay in jail, then, because I will not put up bail. And I’ll just go on with my prayer-vigil and fast, while I’m in prison.”

He looked me over and said, “I see.” And he left.

About five minutes later, another attorney came in. He was a young Chicano. His attitude was the opposite of the voice of doom that had just left. He slapped me on the back and said, “Well, did you know that you made the *Los Angeles Times*? You’re on the second page. And there’s all kinds of press out there. The judge is hysterical. He wants to get you out of here as fast as he can.”

That kind of bowled me over. “Well, the other public defender told me that I couldn’t be released on my O. R., that I would have to be bailed out. And that I just plain refuse to do. I’ll stay in prison to do my fasting, as part of my protest.”

He laughed. “Don’t worry, the judge won’t ask you to bail yourself out. He’s embarrassed by the whole situation, and he really wants you out of here—fast!”

So, I walked into the courtroom with this charming young man. When I appeared, about a half dozen people among the spectators stood up. A lot of others stood up when they saw my collar, and some of them joined in this demonstration. Warmth flowed through me. I knew I wasn’t lost or abandoned. I could see Steve, Mother, my secretary and several others. The judge did not stop the little ovation. He waited until it was quiet. Originally I had been told that I was to be charged with inciting to riot, but the charge had been reduced to simply obstructing a public sidewalk. The proceedings were short, sweet, cut, and dried. I pleaded not guilty to the charge, and asked to be released on my own recognizance. My Chicano attorney friend prompted me there. The judge set trial for July 9th and ordered my immediate release.

I didn’t even have to go back through the whole waiting procedure to get my things. A bailiff just handed me an envelope and asked me to open it and sign for the contents. It held all of my effects. I signed, turned around, and as I put my things in my pockets, I walked out of the courtroom a free man—temporarily.

Then I got a closer look at those beaming faces. One was a young transvestite I knew. Here was this young man, still all done up in high drag. He’d been to an all night Gay Liberation dance. His mascara was running. He was crying. He needed a shave. His beard was coming through all of those layers of makeup. He was a sight. Well, the whole scene just bewildered everyone. Most didn’t know what to make of it. We all embraced. We cried. We kissed on the cheek, and we hustled out of there.

## PERRY BRASS

*Writer and activist Perry Brass, a former member of the Gay Liberation Front, coedited Come Out! magazine and cofounded the Gay Men's Health Project. In this piece for Come Out!, Brass conveys the exhilaration experienced by the thousands of people who participated in Christopher Street Liberation Day 1970, the first LGBTQ pride march.*

### “We Did It!”

We did it! The Park was right there and it was ours. We had done it. It did not seem possible that it could be over, that the long march could be over, that the long march had been the culmination of the long, wonderful weekend, a weekend of love and warmth and talking and seeing new people and finding out new things about ourselves as new people, how could this be over? So the park was right there and once we got there the question was what to do with it? Where was the music? Where were the speakers? What were we going to do with the Park? And the answer, of course, was us. We were the speakers. Maybe fourteen thousand speakers. We were the music. Maybe fourteen thousand pieces of music, all of it inside of us, from the Stones to Mahler. And we were love. It was all around us, possibly the first time love had reappeared in the park on such a large scale since the first Easter Be-In three years ago when once before, to my knowledge, the Sheeps Meadow was filled with love. For we were there outrageously upfront with our love for each other. The world saw what we were for the first time in God knows, indeed only God knows, how many years. As one of the parade marshals said, “Sing it loud, sing it clear! We’re not in the dark, crowded gay bars now; we’re out in the open. Sing it loud. Sing it clear. Gay is proud. Gay is here!”

For some people the march was and will be one of the highest points in their lives. The courage that it took for some people to make those first steps from Sheridan Square into Sixth Avenue and out of the Village was the summoning up of a whole lifetime's desire to finally come clear, to say the truth as it is, to expose themselves nakeder than any pinup boy in any flesh book, to show their heads as well as their bodies and to put their heads and souls where their bodies have been for so many years. It meant the possibility of taking all consequences unquestionably. For some people this would be the first time in their lives they had indeed come out, come out of hiding, come out from the docks, the dark bars, the unlighted avenues that have been their refuges and face their parents, schools, jobs, all of the media's blackmail capacity that has made everything out in the streets now out in the country. But that was where we were: out of the closets and into the streets. "If your mother could only see you now!" one old man on a sidewalk in the village shouted. Well she certainly could if she tried hard enough, and it's about time she did. Because it's about time fourteen million (give or take a few million, according to Kinsey) people in America stopped being bachelors or single Americans and started being gay women and men.

For some people the March was the thing. Or getting to the park. "TOGETHER. Together!" And right-on to that!

But for many people the whole week had been one of the busiest, most fruitful weeks of their lives and that was that. It had been a week of gay pride. It had been a week of saying "Do you know what week this is?" And answering, "Yes, it's gay pride week." It had been a time of walking up to people you didn't know and watching their faces when they read things handed to them that said THIS IS GAY PRIDE WEEK and that was that. It was a fact. Whether you were gay, straight, or ambidextrous, that was it. It was Gay Pride Week, just like the coming of a holiday you've never heard about and suddenly discovered and the holiday became a time and feeling, a mass feeling, like Mardi Gras.

Sunday night some of us were tired. The festival had exploded in front of us like a great firework that we had only hoped would come



off and, wow, had it, but we were very tired from meeting new people from all over the country and feeding them at Washington Square Church and hassling with wines and dancing at GAA's massive Dance or at GLF's little dances vibrant with twisting, joyous circle dances, and workshops at AU, and sit-ins, and from people. Most of all from people, new people, old people, angry and loving people. Tired from coming out and being ourselves, a much harder trip than the three-mile walk from Sheridan Square to the Park, not walking in protest but in affirmation that we exist and are together to love together and we are gay and WE ARE GAY PRIDE WEEK.

## JEANNE CÓRDOVA

*Jeanne Córdova was an activist and writer, editing The Lesbian Tide newsmagazine in 1971. In When We Were Outlaws: A Memoir of Love & Revolution, she describes the many political intersections taking place in LGBTQ activism in Los Angeles in the 1970s, including planning protests with Morris Kight to coincide with the second anniversary of the Stonewall uprising.*

### From *When We Were Outlaws*

On June 27, the night of the march, despite the widespread rumor that the LAPD was going to shut the whole damn thing down and arrest everyone, two thousand queers showed up!

The assemblage at the corner of Hawthorn and McCadden Place was mass confusion. I passed Freda Smith, a Sacramento organizer from the Gay Women's West Coast Conference, and yelled to her, "Grab every dyke you see and tell them to look for the Lesbian Mothers banner!" I pointed toward it at the head of the march. We lesbians didn't have much in the way of signs, but at the conference Del Martin had raised the issue of lesbian mothers losing custody cases in court—an issue that scared many of us. Myself and other organizers had only convinced about half of the attendees that marching in a gay parade was also a lesbian issue. To many of these women Stonewall and the Christopher Street West annual march was a gay male birthday.

Because of my telltale organizer armband, marchers were besieging me. They were arriving by car, foot, bus, and bicycle. "Will there be trouble with the pigs?" "Who should I march with?" Most gay men looked blankly at me saying they didn't belong to any group. They'd only heard that this was gay Sunday in Hollywood.

They'd hitchhiked from Phoenix, or bussed in from Colorado looking for someplace on earth to be openly gay. Even a group called the Gay Community Alliance had flown in from Hawaii.

Finally, with the sun setting to our backs, we were chanting and marching abreast down Hollywood Boulevard, every newly conscripted gay draftee shouting at the top of his and her voice. Dashing up and down as a monitor, I paused and almost came to tears. A banner carried by an elderly, straight-looking woman walking alone read, Heterosexuals for Homosexual Freedom. I wanted to salute this woman. Someday, perhaps even in my own lifetime, gays will be free, I told myself.

That day was not tonight. Uniformed cops were everywhere. Several cars had male drivers dressed in full suit and tie, plainclothes LAPD vice or Feds. The rumors of LAPD files were true—they were taking photos of every monitor and anyone who looked like they were organizers including myself.

When I was social working in South Central three years after the Watts Rebellion of '65, I'd seen many armed young men and learned that the FBI's counter-intelligence program was all over the black activist community. The Feds wanted nothing more than to hunt down every member of the so-called insurrectionist Black Panthers, who they believed sought the violent overthrow of white America.

Today they were here. But today this was my people, my march.

Looking ahead I saw the march was indeed breaking up into segments, crowds were bunching up at those damn intersections. Monitors were not in place. Our people were looking vacantly at one another wondering whether or not to venture into traffic.

I rushed into the hugely jammed intersection at Cahuenga and motioned the marchers to cross. Standing alone, my arms outstretched against traffic, I tried to look like an imposing figure. An aging Ford stopped in front of me, and out of it emerged a bearded, blond guy in overalls, who screamed, "The only good fag is a dead fag! Get the fuck out of my way!"

"Ladies!" I screamed at a group of feathered drag queens waiting on the corner. "Come here, I need you!"

The frenzied fags ran devotedly into battle. “What’s the matter, honey?” the group’s leader asked.

I pointed toward my Aryan. “Go kiss him. Get him back into his car so our people can cross the intersection!”

The gaggle of queens descended upon the tall, now speechless blond. One stroked his arm, another pinched his butt. The muscled straight guy shrank from the queens. The only safe place was in his car. Quickly, he jumped back in, slammed the door, raised the windows, and locked himself in. Drag-phobia had saved the day!

“Right on!” I yelled to my “sisters” as I waved our marchers through the now safe intersection.

I looked forward. As planned, the head of the march was starting to leave the sidewalks and take the street. Seeing a banner reading Out of the Closets & into the Streets, I ran forward to meet Morris, arms raised in triumph.



The Los Angeles 1971 commemoration of Stonewall was the first of many grassroots events I would organize with Morris Kight over the next decades to fight for the rights of gay men and lesbians, struggling not just with the politicians but also with other gay and lesbian leaders to keep the burgeoning movement from straying from its grass roots or, among other morasses, into the New Left of class politics. Still, it wasn’t until 1974 that one of our particular efforts at making legislative change finally met with a cumulative success. One of the things I’d learned from my mentor was to think outside the box, to revel in the unexpected. But I was more than a little shook up that summer, when Morris called me and Troy Perry, the founder of the new gay Metropolitan Community Church, over to his McCadden Place haunt and asked us to volunteer to be arrested as sex criminals.

Morris had decided that the quickest way to bring down California’s Penal Codes against sodomy and oral copulation—PC 288a and 286—was to get a gay, a lesbian, and a straight couple to publicly confess to these sex crimes, and trick the police into

arresting us. Those couples turned out to be Troy and his lover Steven Gordon, a straight couple named Jeanie Barney and her boyfriend, and me and BeJo. I hesitated about this caper, but I'd always found it difficult to say no to Morris. Finally, I'd committed us. BeJo didn't share my readiness. She panicked when I brought the legal paperwork home for us to sign. "I haven't come out to my parents in Iowa. You're out of your mind."

It was eerily quiet in our apartment that night as BeJo and I didn't speak. I wondered if Troy's young lover, new to the movement, was making things tense at his house too. I'd noticed that Morris hadn't put himself forward. "I don't have a lover," he'd said. His role in the plan was to make a citizen's arrest and haul us down to Rampart Division Police Headquarters after the press conference.

"I don't suppose you have a back-up lesbian couple?" I asked Morris on the phone. BeJo still hadn't said yes.

"No, I can't find any other out lesbian couple willing to do this," he said. "But don't worry; our lawyers will be at the police station to bail you out as soon as possible."

The evening passed like time on a broken clock. Finally, I heard BeJo call in to work saying she'd come down with a cold and needed tomorrow off.

By the time she and I arrived at the Los Angeles Press Club, BeJo was covered with anxiety-provoked sweat. With cameras flashing and microphones popping under the bright lights of the Press Club, somehow the risk felt surreal. I read aloud my carefully composed statement:

"I am here in the name of thousands of lesbian mothers who have stood before California Judges and heard, 'This woman is unfit, and she has no right to her child because she is homosexual.' I am here in the name of hundreds of lesbians who have been dishonorably discharged from the services, thrown out of their jobs, their homes, their churches. In the name of those whose lives have been ruined in the name of this Penal Code law, I demand to be arrested!"

Morris's smiling face at the end of the table gave me courage. I went on to recount the case of two women in Michigan having been

arrested for making love in their camping tent in the forest. One of them had just finished serving three years in the state penitentiary.

By the end of the press conference the *L.A. Times* had shown up, but the police had not. Morris stood up and arrested us “in the name of the good state of California.” He promptly loaded us into a bus bannered with the sign The Felons Six in which we took a slow but very public ride, waving and explaining our action to sidewalk passersby, through the major boulevards of Hollywood and downtown LA.

Once inside the Rampart Station a media-savvy Commander Wise announced, “I will not take custody of these people. We did not see the crime in action.” So it was off to the District Attorney’s Office, where our straight lawyer (there were no out gay lawyers in ’74) insisted to the DA that he didn’t need to *see* our crime in person because there was nothing in the law exempting private or consensual oral copulation.

Assistant D.A. Jacobson met with our lawyer behind closed doors for almost an hour. We felons and our entourage waited, standing with a hopeful BeJo and young Steve, while the entire D.A.’s staff gawked at us—the self-confessed homosexuals. Finally, a much-distressed Jacobson went before the gathered press cameras. “Any groups or individuals who wish to change current laws in California should take their complaint to the state legislature,” he said. “I didn’t make the law.” Then he instructed his security to escort us out of his office. Being arrested for trespassing seemed anticlimactic and not on-message. We cleared out.

Once home we printed thousands of leaflets urging gay couples to openly break these Penal Codes. Months later California Governor Jerry Brown, pushed strongly by Morris Kight and the whole damn statewide gay and lesbian movement, signed an Executive Order overturning California’s anti-sodomy laws. My mentor and I were one giant step closer to freedom for our people.

## MARSHA P. JOHNSON, FROM INTERVIEW WITH ALLEN YOUNG

*After Stonewall, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera started Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) for both political action and community building. In this interview with Allen Young, Johnson describes the work of STAR, as well as the difference among transvestites, drag queens, and transsexuals in the common parlance of the era. Allen Young is an activist and writer. His most recent book is Left, Gay & Green: A Writer's Life.*

### “Rapping with a Street Transvestite Revolutionary”

*You were starting to tell me a few minutes ago that a group of STAR\* people got busted. What was that all about?*

Well, we wrote an article for Arthur Bell, of the *Village Voice*, about STAR, and we told him that we were all “girlies” and we’re working up on the 42nd Street area. And we all gave our names—Bambi, Andorra, Marsha, and Sylvia. And we all went out to hustle, you know, about a few days after the article came out in the *Village Voice*, and you see we get busted one after another, in a matter of a couple of weeks. I don’t know whether it was the article, or whether we just got busted because it was hot.

*Were they arresting a lot of transvestites up around there?*

Oh, yes, and they still are. They’re still taking a lot of transvestites and a lot of women down to jail.

*How do they make the arrests?*

They just come up and grab you. One transvestite they grabbed right out of her lover's arms, and took her down. The charges were solicitation. I was busted on direct prostitution. I picked up a detective—he was in a New Jersey car. I said, "Do you work for the police?" And he said no, and he propositioned me and told me he'd give me fifteen dollars, and then he told me I was under arrest. So I had to do twenty days in jail.

*Was the situation in jail bad?*

Yes, it was. A lot of transvestites were fighting amongst each other. They have a lot of problems, you know. They can't go to court; they can't get a court date. Some of them are waiting for years. You know, they get frustrated and start fighting with one another. An awful lot of fights go on there.

*How are relations between the transvestites and the straight prisoners? Is that a big problem?*

Oh, the straight prisoners treat transvestites like they're queens. They send them over cigarettes and candy, envelopes and stamps and stuff like that—when they got money. Occasionally they treat them nice. Not all the time.

*Is there any brutality or anything like that?*

No, the straight prisoners can't get over by the gay prisoners. They're separated. The straight prisoners are on one side, and the gay prisoners are on another.

*Can you say something about the purpose of STAR as a group?*



We want to see all gay people have a chance, equal rights, as straight people have in America. We don't want to see gay people picked up on the streets for things like loitering or having sex or anything like that. STAR originally was started by the president, Sylvia Lee Rivera, and Bubbles Rose Marie, and they asked me to come in as the vice president. STAR is a very revolutionary group. We believe in picking up the gun, starting a revolution if necessary. Our main goal is to see gay people liberated and free and have equal rights that other people have in America. We'd like to see our gay brothers and sisters out of jail and on the streets again. There are a lot of gay transvestites who have been in jail for no reason at all, and the reason why they don't get out is they can't get a lawyer or any bail. Bambi and I made a lot of contacts when we were in jail, and Andorra, she went to court and she walked out.

*What do you mean she walked out?*

Well, when you're picked up for loitering and you don't have a police record, a lot of times they let you go, and they let your police record build up, and then they'll go back there and look at it—and then they give you a lot of time. That's how they work it down there at the courthouse. Like my bail was \$1,000, because I have a long record for prostitution, and they refused to make it lower than \$500. So when I went to court they told me they'd let me go if I pleaded guilty to prostitution. That's how they do it, they tell you ahead of time what you're going to get. Like before you even go before the judge, they try to make an agreement with you, so that they can get your case out of court, you know.

*What would have happened if you'd pleaded not guilty?*

I would still be there. They gave me 20 days to serve. And a lot of people do that a lot of times. That's how come their record is so bad, because they always plead guilty just so they can come out, 'cause

they can't get no lawyer or no money or no kind of help from the streets.

*What are you doing now about these people who are still in there who need lawyers?*

We're planning a dance. We can help as soon as we get money. I have the names and addresses of people that are in jail, and we're going to write them a letter and let them know that we've got them a lawyer, and have these lawyers go down there and see if they can get their names put on the calendar early, get their cases put out of court, make a thorough investigation.

*I remember when STAR was first formed there was a lot of discussion about the special oppression that transvestites experience. Can you say something about that?*

We still feel oppression by other gay brothers. Gay sisters don't think too bad of transvestites. Gay brothers do. I went to a dance at Gay Activist Alliance just last week, and there was not even one gay brother that came over and said hello. They'd say hello, but they'd get away very quick. The only transvestites they were very friendly with were the ones that looked freaky in drag, like freak drag, with no tits, no nothing. Well, I can't help but have tits, they're mine. And those men weren't too friendly at all. Once in a while, I get an invitation to Daughters of Bilitis, and when I go there, they're always warm. All the gay sisters come over and say, "Hello, we're glad to see you," and they start long conversations. But not the gay brothers. They're not too friendly at all toward transvestites.

*Do you understand why? Do you have any explanation for that?*

Of course I can understand why. A lot of gay brothers don't like women! And transvestites remind you of women. A lot of the gay

brothers don't feel too close to women, they'd rather be near men, that's how come they're gay. And when they see a transvestite coming, she reminds them of a woman automatically, and they don't want to get too close or too friendly with her.

*Are you more comfortable around straight men than around gay men sometimes?*

Oh, I'm very comfortable around straight men. Well, I know how to handle them. I've been around them for years, from working the streets. But I don't like straight men. I'm not too friendly with them. There's only one thing they want—to get up your dress. They're really insulting to women. All they think about is getting up your dress, anything to get up that dress of yours. Then when you get pregnant or something, they don't even want to know you.

*Do you find that there are some “straight” men who prefer transvestites to women?*

There are some, but not that many. There's a lot of gay men that prefer transvestites. It's mostly bisexual-type men, you know, they like to go both ways but don't like anybody to know what's happening. Rather than pick up a gay man, they'll pick up a gay transvestite.

*When you hustle on 42nd Street, do they know you're a transvestite, or do they think you're a woman? Or does it depend?*

Some of them do and some of them don't, because I tell them. I say, “It's just like a grocery store; you either shop or you don't shop.” Lots of times they tell me, “You're not a woman!” I say, “I don't know what I am if I'm not a woman.” They say, “Well, you're not a woman.” They say, “Let me see your cunt.” I say, “Honey, let me tell you something.” I say, “You can either take it or leave it,” because,

see, when I go out to hustle I don't particularly care whether I get the date or not. If they take me, they got to take me as I want 'em to take me. And if they want to go up my dress, I just charge them a little extra, and the price just goes up and up and up and up. And I always get all of my money in advance, that's what a smart transvestite does. I don't ever let them tell me, "I'll pay you after the job is done." I say I want it in advance. Because no woman gets paid after their job is done. If you're smart, you get the money first.

*What sort of living arrangements has STAR worked out?*

Well, we had our STAR home, at 213 E. 2nd Street, and you know, there was only one lesbian there, and a lot of stuff used to get robbed from her and I used to feel so sorry for her. People used to come in and steal her little methadone, because she was on drugs. I seen her the other day. She was the only lesbian who was staying with us. I really felt bad. She's back on drugs again. And she was really doing good. The only reason I didn't take her from STAR home and bring her here was the simple reason that I couldn't handle it. My nerves have been very bad lately, and I've been trying to get myself back together since my husband died in March. It's very hard for me. He just died in March. He was on drugs. He went out to get some money to buy some drugs and he got shot. He died on 2nd Street and First Avenue. I was home sleeping, and somebody came and knocked at the door and told me he was shot. And I was so upset that I just didn't know what to do. And right after he died, the dog died, and the lesbian that was staying there was nice enough to pick the dog up out of the street for me. I couldn't hardly stand it. I had two deaths this year, my lover and then the dog. So I've just had bad nerves; I've been going to the doctor left and right. And then to get arrested for prostitution was just the tops!

*What about job alternatives? Is it possible to get jobs?*

Oh, definitely. I know many transvestites that are working as women, but I want to see the day when transvestites can go in and say, "My name is Mister So-and-So and I'd like a job as Miss So-and-So!" I can get a job as Miss Something-or-Other, but I have to hide the fact that I'm a male. But not necessarily. Many transvestites take jobs as boys in the beginning, and then after a while they go into their female attire and keep on working. It's easier for a transsexual than a transvestite. If you are a transsexual it's much easier because you become more feminine, and you have a bust-line, and the hair falls off your face and off your legs, and the muscles fall out of your arms. But I think it will be quite a while before a natural transvestite will be able to get a job, unless she's a young transvestite with no hair on her face and very feminine looking.

*Isn't it dangerous sometimes when someone thinks you're a woman and then they find out you're a man?*

Yes it is. You can lose your life. I've almost lost my life five times; I think I'm like a cat. A lot of times I pick up men, and they think I'm a woman and then they try to rob me. I remember the first time I ever had sex with a man, and I was in the Bronx. It was a Spanish man; I was trying to hustle him for carfare to come back to New York City. And he took my clothes off and he found out I was a boy and he pulled a knife off of his dresser and he threatened me and I had to give him sex for nothing. And I went to a hotel one time, and I told this young soldier that I was a boy, and he didn't want to believe it and then when we got to the hotel I took off my clothes and he found out I was a boy for real and then he got mad and he got his gun and he wanted to shoot me. It's very dangerous being a transvestite going out on dates because it's so easy to get killed. Just recently I got robbed by two men. They robbed me and tried to put a thing around my neck and a blindfold around my face. They wanted to tie my hands and let me out of the car, but I didn't let them tie me up. I just hopped right out of the car. There was two of them,

too. I cut my finger by accident, but they snatched my wig. I don't let men tie me up. I'd rather they shoot me with my hands untied. I got robbed once. A man pulled a gun on me and snatched my pocketbook in a car. I don't trust men that much anymore. Recently I haven't been dating. I've been going to straight bars and drinking, getting my money that way, giving people conversation, keeping them company while they're at the bar. They buy you a drink, but of course they don't know you're a boy. You just don't go out with any of them. Like my friend; she gets paid for entertaining customers, talking to them, getting them to buy a drink. I'm just learning about this field; I've never been in it before. That's what I've been doing. I've been getting a lot of dollar bills without even doing anything. I tell them I need money for dinner.

*Is one of the goals of STAR to make transvestites closer to each other? Do transvestites tend to be a close-knit group of friends?*

Usually most transvestites are friendly towards one another because they're just alike. Most transvestites usually get along with one another until it comes to men. The men would separate the transvestites. Because a lot of transvestites could be very good friends, you know, and then when they get a boyfriend . . . Like when I had my husband, he didn't allow me to hang around with transvestites, he wanted me to get away from them all. I felt bad, and I didn't get away from them. He didn't like me to speak to them and hang around with them too much. He wanted me to go in the straight world, like the straight bars and stuff like that.

*Do you think there's been any improvement between transvestites and other gay men since the formation of STAR, within the gay world, within the gay movement?*

Well, I went to GAA one time and everybody turned around and looked. All these people that spoke to me there were people that I had known from when I had worked in the Gay Liberation Front

community center, but they weren't friendly at all. It's just typical. They're not used to seeing transvestites in female attire. They have a transvestite there, Natasha, but she wears boys' clothes, with no tits or nothing. When they see me or Sylvia come in, they just turn around and they look hard.

*Some of the transvestites aren't so political; what do they think about your revolutionary ideas?*

They don't even care. I've talked to many of the transvestites up around the Times Square area. They don't even care about a revolution or anything. They've got what they want. Many of them are on drugs. Some of them have lovers, you know. And they don't even come to STAR meetings.

*How many people come to STAR meetings?*

About 30, and we haven't even been holding STAR meetings recently. Like Sylvia doesn't have a place to sleep, she's staying with friends on 109th St.

*Is there something you'd like to add?*

I'd like to see STAR get closer to GAA and other gay people in the community. I'd like to see a lot more transvestites come to STAR meetings, but it's hard to get in touch with transvestites. They're at these bars, and they're looking for husbands. There's a lot of transvestites who are very lonely, and they just go to bars to look for husbands and lovers, just like gay men do. When they get married, they don't have time for STAR meetings. I'd like to see the gay revolution get started, but there hasn't been any demonstration or anything recently. You know how the straight people are. When they don't see any action they think, "Well, gays are all forgotten now, they're worn out, they're tired." I would like to see STAR with

a big bank account like we had before, and I'd like to see that STAR home again.

*Do you have suggestions for people in small towns and cities where there is no STAR?*

Start a STAR of their own. I think if transvestites don't stand up for themselves, nobody else is going to stand up for transvestites. If a transvestite doesn't say I'm gay and I'm proud and I'm a transvestite, then nobody else is going to hop up there and say I'm gay and I'm proud and I'm a transvestite for them, because they're not transvestites. The life of a transvestite is very hard, especially when she goes out in the streets.

*Is it one of the goals of STAR to create a situation so transvestites don't have to go out in the street?*

So we don't have to hustle anymore? It's one of the goals of STAR in the future, but one of the first things STAR has to do is reach people before they get on drugs, 'cause once they get on drugs it's very, very hard to get them off and out of the street. A lot of people on the streets are supporting their habits. There's very few transvestites out on the streets that don't use drugs.

*What about the term "drag queen." People in STAR prefer to use the term "transvestite." Can you explain the difference?*

A drag queen is one that usually goes to a ball, and that's the only time she gets dressed up. Transvestites live in drag. A transsexual spends most of her life in drag. I never come out of drag to go anywhere. Everywhere I go I get all dressed up. A transvestite is still like a boy, very manly looking, a feminine boy. You wear drag here and there. When you're a transsexual, you have hormone



treatments and you're on your way to a sex change, and you never come out of female clothes.

*You'd be considered a preoperative transsexual, then? You don't know when you'd be able to go through the sex change?*

Oh, most likely this year. I'm planning to go to Sweden. I'm working very hard to go.

*It's cheaper there than it is at Johns Hopkins?*

It's \$300 for a change, but you've got to stay there a year.

*Do you know what STAR will be doing in the future?*

We're going to be doing STAR dances, open a new STAR home, a STAR telephone, 24 hours a day, a STAR recreation center. But this is only after our bank account is pretty well together. And plus we're going to have a bail fund for every transvestite that's arrested, to see they get out on bail, and see if we can get a STAR lawyer to help transvestites in court.

*In the meantime if anyone wants to write to STAR for information what address should they write to?*

211 Eldridge Street, Apartment 3, c/o Marsha Johnson, vice president, STAR, New York, NY.

*What's that thing going to be?*

What thing?

*That thing you just made.*

It's a G-string. Want to see? This is so that if anybody sticks their hand up your dress, they don't feel anything. They wear them at the 82 Club. See? Everybody that's a drag queen knows how to make one. See, it just hides everything.

*If they reach up there, they don't find out what's really there!*

I don't care if they do reach up there. I don't care if they do find out what's really there. That's their business.

*I guess a lot of transvestites know how to fight back anyway!*

I carry my wonder drug everywhere I go—a can of Mace. If they attack me, I'm going to attack them, with my bomb.

*Did you ever have to use it?*

Not yet, but I'm patient.

# KIYOSHI KUROMIYA

*Born in a Japanese American internment camp, Kiyoshi Kuromiya was a lifelong activist whose work spanned the homophile movement, gay liberation, and ACT UP. In this interview he discusses the racial politics of the homophile movement and gay liberation, as well as their connections with other political movements. Marc Stein is the Jamie and Phyllis Pasker Professor of History at San Francisco State University. His most recent book is The Stonewall Riots: A Documentary History. The Philadelphia LGBT History Project collection is held at the John J. Wilcox Jr. Archives, William Way LGBT Community Center.*

## From Philadelphia LGBT History Project Interview with Marc Stein

MARC STEIN: Now maybe to shift gears a little bit and backtrack really to the early '60s, I know that's when you got involved with the civil rights movement and then later with the antiwar movement before, really, you got really active in the gay movement. Is that fair to say?

KIYOSHI KUROMIYA: Yes. Yes. And within those movements, I would say I was fairly closeted until 1965. Actually is that '65 or '66 when the first march at Independence Hall took place?

STEIN: '65.

KUROMIYA: '65, yeah.

STEIN: It happened for five years, so the last one was '69.

KUROMIYA: '65, there was a large antiwar march, 250 people. I knew every single person in that march. And I was in the march with twelve of us. In fact, I could almost name all twelve of them.

STEIN: At the '65 Independence Hall Annual Reminder?

KUROMIYA: Yes.

STEIN: Or what became the Annual Reminder.

KUROMIYA: Yeah, it was Clark Polak. And we met over at Trojan Book Service. Craig Rodwell, who later formed Oscar Wilde Bookstore. We were in a Falcon convertible. And we packed all the signs up, put them in the back of the convertible, and went down there. What's his name from Washington?

STEIN: Frank Kameny?

KUROMIYA: Frank Kameny.

STEIN: Any women at that first one?

KUROMIYA: Yes. Barbara Gittings was there? I'm not sure.

STEIN: Well she told me she missed the first one, I think.

KUROMIYA: O.K., that's right. She wasn't there. I was trying to think, but no, she wasn't there. There were twelve of us. O.K. And I don't remember anyone else. Frank Kameny was insistent, it was very hot that day, was insistent that we not take off our coats or loosen our ties. We were wearing coats and ties because we wanted to make a good impression. The first impression, you know. We aren't monsters.

STEIN: Now, did you literally walk over from an antiwar demonstration? Is that what you were saying or no?

KUROMIYA: No, no. I met over at Trojan Book Service and we drove over there with the picket signs. And we didn't know how many people would show up. It was small. There were twelve of us. I didn't know there was going to be an antiwar demonstration.

STEIN: Oh I see.

KUROMIYA: So it was a pretty big coming out for me.

STEIN: Because they all saw you?

KUROMIYA: Yeah. On the other hand, it was a pretty big coming out with that group. I mean there were other groups that knew I was gay. But people that knew me from civil rights movement, including one person, I can mention his name, Horace Godwin, who's still around, came up with his mother and his sister and thanked me. And later he came over to 27th Street to talk to me. But he was, I guess, somewhat closeted at the time.

STEIN: He's a Philadelphian or a Washingtonian?

KUROMIYA: He's a Philadelphian. And he came over. I'm trying to think of other people that were there.

STEIN: There was a woman in D.C. who came up a lot. I've forgotten her name just now.

KUROMIYA: I'm not sure. Possibly, and I couldn't be certain about this, but he would be at these events very regularly, Randy Wicker. But I knew some of these people. In fact, I knew Barbara Gittings from East Coast Homophile Organization meetings. I remember particularly, maybe a year earlier in '64, I think, one ECHO conference at the Barbizon Plaza on Central Park South. There were maybe twenty, maybe twenty-five of us there.

STEIN: You had gone up from Philly to New York, right?

KUROMIYA: Yes. I had gone up to New York to meet with them and this actually is in the videotape interview on *Outrage '69*, the Arthur Dong tape. I showed up there and suddenly realized—I was used to civil rights activists—and I thought, “These are the activists and they're really courageous and everything, but they were accountants

and librarians.” It was a little bit of a surprise. There were no flaming radicals. It was a pretty staid group of people. Very meeting-like. And very tame. And I was mostly looking for information. In fact, this activity and later the Homophile Action League in Philadelphia led me, at a meeting at the Unitarian Church at 22nd and Chestnut, to send a note up, at this fairly large meeting of the Homophile Action League in 1969, to the front of the meeting. And the note said we were or I was considering forming a Gay Liberation Front. And if anyone was interested, they should contact me at the back of the room. And they made an announcement at the meeting. And what was surprising to me was they changed all the wording around and everything. And I thought, “Well gee, that’s odd.” But the fact was that Basil O’Brien had talked to them about making an announcement. Same announcement, same meeting. O.K. So that’s when I first met Basil O’Brien. And that was the beginning of Gay Liberation Front in Philadelphia. And Basil died in 1985.

STEIN: I want to pick up on GLF, but just to stay in the ’60s for a minute.

KUROMIYA: O.K.

STEIN: The picture you just presented of ECHO, that’s consistent with most of what I’ve seen. And yet Clark Polak seems to have been a little different from the other folks. Not nearly so respectable.

KUROMIYA: I guess I was attracted because of that very fact. I was fascinated with *Drum* and with Trojan Book Service. Because it had a little more of the feeling that I was used to ’cause I’d been in civil rights. I had been in the sit-ins in November of 1962 on Route 40 in Maryland. We had been chased out of restaurants and bars there. And played “God Bless America” endlessly on the jukebox while they were refusing to serve us. And split a grilled cheese sandwich that they did serve a *New York Times* reporter. And I said, “Well we’ve been sitting here for six hours and hadn’t been able to get

anything. They won't throw us out because this is a Continental Trailways official stop and they would lose their license." They would lose their franchise if they threw us out, so they're just letting us sit. But we found they got some good music on the jukebox. And so "God Bless America," we played it over and over. They finally unplugged the jukebox. The *New York Times* reporter gave me half of his grilled cheese sandwich. I broke it into little pieces and passed it down. And we were all eating these grilled cheese sandwiches. That's when the management got really angry. They were giving out free beer to all the townspeople. And it looked like it might get seriously dangerous so we left. The roads were icy. They chased us down the roads and cars were sliding all over the highway. But I was used to that, so I had the same feeling about Clark Polak and also Craig Rodwell. So the three of us met at Trojan Book Service and in I'm not sure whose car it was. Probably Clark's. It was an old early '60s Falcon convertible. And we put all the picket signs. We had many too many picket signs. But I guess through the ECHO conference, they had announced the demo. And some people from other cities had showed up.

STEIN: So you had positive impressions of Clark Polak. 'Cause not everyone did.

KUROMIYA: O.K. Well I do in that he was doing stuff and other people weren't. And so I'm not talking about personalities. I'm sure the personalities would clash and I'm sure people thought he was a purveyor of porn and all that kind of stuff. But that didn't bother me one bit. And you probably could have said the same thing about Craig Rodwell. But Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookstore is pretty respectable.

STEIN: Was your feeling that the movement in both the Clark Polak wing and the other wing in the '60s treated lesbians well? Treated lesbians equally?

KUROMIYA: I can't say that, O.K.? On the other hand, I can say that much of the leadership of the ECHO conferences was women. And I do acknowledge on the *Outrage* '69 interview that these people were really courageous, because there was a period of time when people that had respectable jobs could be ostracized and fired. There was a period of time when people did lose their jobs. Frank Kameny. And I was part of the movement and of course probably people didn't like me for other reasons. I thought it was absurd, Frank Kameny telling us we couldn't hold hands in the picket line. That we couldn't loosen our ties or take off coats. There were women in there. You couldn't wear slacks if you were a woman. He had made up this set of rules. It was purely for the press. It was the idea that this is the first event of its kind and we want the press to concentrate on the fact that we look and act like everybody else, not like a caricature—whatever that meant to him—of what people thought we were.

STEIN: What about race in the movement? Did you ever experience any kind of racial discrimination or prejudice in the homophile movement in the '60s? Did it seem pretty open?

KUROMIYA: I don't think I saw any "people of color" in the early days at all. I'm trying to think. There may have been at the ECHO conferences, but they certainly weren't in a prominent place there. I'm thinking about the picket line in '65, I don't think so. But my memory could be faulty. It's been thirty-two years or something. And that's why when Gay Liberation Front was formed in 1969, we were particularly proud because we had a significant proportion of African Americans, Latinos, and Asians. I mean we were a small group, a dozen or maybe at most two dozen people. But we had more than one Asian. Lee Claflin's mother is Japanese. We had ministers, ministers of black churches in our group. We would meet, actually we predate South Street. Some of our earliest meetings were at a place called the Gayzoo at 2nd and South.

STEIN: I've found traces of that, too. And yet [an anonymous oral history narrator] said something about meeting at the TLA. He



thought he had helped get some space at the old TLA.

KUROMIYA: O.K. It's possible. We met wherever we could. And I can name a number of places. We met on 27th Street, we met in people's houses, we met regularly at the Gayzoo for more organized meetings. We met at the Casket Company in Powelton Village. We met at places on Gaskill Street. There were places in that South Street area, but there were no businesses. Gayzoo was one of the very first.

STEIN: Actually, can you maybe step back a second and talk to me about how you think gay liberation differed from the movement that came before it? What was different about it?

KUROMIYA: Well the racial composition. We tried to do something about gender balance, but that was never really worked out. And later we resigned ourselves to it and said perhaps it's inappropriate. We also were well versed in these documents like Martha Shelley's "Woman-Identified Woman." And I had my own views. I don't want to define the women's movement, but it was almost the idea that gay liberation had to do with men's consciousness raising. And the women's movement generally had to do with looking for a woman-identified woman. And these were kind of parallel consciousness-raising movements, with the leadership on both sides being gay.

STEIN: And do you think there was a danger in that? In being separate in that way?

KUROMIYA: I think in the early days of a movement, this may be quite appropriate. Because there's a level of life and death camaraderie that's got to be in there. Because we're talking about affinity groups, O.K. An affinity group, I think you have to share certain kinds of perspective. And it's easier to deal with that, I think, if you share on all levels, including gender. It would be hard for me to discuss, let's say, what it means to be a woman-identified woman. In fact I would be thrown out of the meeting if I tried to do that.

STEIN: But on the male side, that philosophy, which I've read a decent amount about, sounds like, in part, this was about creating some bridges between straight-identified and gay-identified men. And you, I know, talked to Tommi about how gay liberation was against the idea that gays were a minority.

KUROMIYA: Yeah. It had to do with male consciousness raising, but it's sort of putting men in touch with their feelings, whether it was sexual or on some other level. But it was certainly not a denial of sexuality. In fact, it was very sex positive in every way. But it had to do with trying to deal with the fact that people were isolated partly so that they would identify only with their sexuality. You compartmentalize the sexual part of your life because you certainly couldn't be as open about it as you might like to be. Because it would end you up in a lot of trouble. I knew that 'cause it had ended me up in jail. So it was based on personal experience, but it was also based on the social mores of the times and trying to deal with our own feelings so that we could talk about these issues. Not the sexism out there, but the sexism in here. And this continues today. My proposal for a PWA [People with AIDS] retreat that was going to deal with sexual issues and race issues was "Unity and Diversity: Mutually Exclusive?" And of course that was rejected. The idea that we can't deal with the racism out there until we can deal with it in ourselves. This is something that I guess came out of the drug culture of the mid-'60s, when people really intensely looked into their psyches and began to deal with the most primordial aspects of sex and race and being a human being versus a rock or something else. And what it meant to be self-assured about what you are, who you are, how you dealt with these issues and that you didn't hide them away. And you didn't compartmentalize them internally. So I guess we would deal with a lot of these issues. Similar kinds of consciousness raising took place in RYM I—that's Revolutionary Youth Movement—the Weather people, and also Black Panther Party, particularly Huey Newton. So there were aspects in other movements that were also dealing with similar kinds of issues on the level of consciousness raising, where you would confront

people. Or in a closed session, you would confront particular issues within yourself and in front of a group of people. And so there were tears and emotions and catharsis.

## JOEL HALL

*Dancer, choreographer, and activist Joel Hall was a part of the Third World Gay Revolution movement in Chicago in the 1970s. In this essay he discusses the oppression faced by LGBTQ people in prison and the Third World Gay Revolution movement.*

### “Growing Up Black and Gay”

When I was about twelve I ran away from home to live with an older man. My father put out a “missing person” on me, and eventually they caught me. When I went to court, the judge asked my father, “Are you aware that your son is a homosexual?” And my father said, “Yes.” We had never talked about it before and that was the first time I had ever heard him refer to me as a homosexual. He was very hurt having to do it in that way. And I felt his pain; it was really a blow to him to have someone come out and ask him, “Are you aware that your son is a homosexual?” with his son standing right there. My father is a very honest man, so he just said, “Yeah.” And the judge said, “Well, we’re going to send him to Galesburg Mental Institution to try to correct his homosexuality.” I couldn’t understand anything that was happening. I had sort of an idea that I would be going to the Youth Commission, but never really accepted the fact that they’d send me to the Youth Commission for something so stupid. But they did.

The first place I was sent was to the Reception Center in Joliet, Illinois. Then I was sent to St. Charles. I stayed there for about six months and got into a fight with my cottage mother. I stole some cigarettes out of her room. They gave homosexuals jobs like cleaning up. So once I took advantage of cleaning up her room and

stole some cigarettes. She came down to the basement and grabbed my arm and told me not to be stealing cigarettes from her. My immediate response was to hit her; I turned around and slapped her in the face. That same night they came and handcuffed me and took me to Sheridan, because that was outrageous, you know, to slap a cottage parent.

Sheridan was a maximum security institution, with two fences with dogs between and guard towers with guns. I stayed there for three months and when I got out I went to high school where I got into more fights and was sent back to Sheridan. I was always fighting. Whenever a prisoner called me a faggot or a punk I would try to knock his brains out. They thought they knew so much about psychology and about homosexuality that they could just put us in any type of situation and we would just play along with the rules. But we really fucked up a lot of things there. We were so outlandish, you know, that we practically ran the institution. Whatever happened, we knew about it, we had something to do with it.

I was in Sheridan the second time for a year, and I was in the hole ten months out of that year. The hole was a small cell with just a light box and a slot underneath where your food came in. And I was let out once every other day for a shower. I'd get a milk pill and a vitamin pill for breakfast, a full lunch, and then a milk pill and a vitamin pill again for dinner. The hole is where they put murderers and rapists, people they feel they can't handle. I was apparently a murderer and a rapist all combined, with my homosexuality, so they put me in the hole.

An awful lot of gay people were committing suicide, hanging themselves. They eventually gave us a building, C-8, and they put us on the fourth gallery, way up at the top. We had all the cells on the top, and even there, people would slice their wrists and refuse to do any work.

One guard was giving an awful lot of trouble. His name was Ivy, Big Ivy, and he used to really give us a lot of hell, you know, beat us up—and this was a grown-ass man, and we were fourteen, fifteen years old. So we planned to get him. First we tried getting him fired by telling lies and saying he was forcing us into homosexual

behavior with him. But we couldn't get him fired because he had been there so long that everybody just wouldn't believe it. So this very good friend of mine—we used to call him Didi—tied a sheet around his neck, and tied it up to the barred windows, and stood on top of his bed. I walked up to the door and started screaming, “Guard, come here! Somebody's trying to hang himself!” Ivy ran up to the door and when he opened it I pushed him in and about seven or eight gay people ran in and threw a blanket over his head and almost beat him to death and left him there. One straight brother who was very close to a lot of us—he always defended us and stuff like this—was taken to the hole; they broke both his arms and both his legs before they got him there.

My first day in Sheridan I was in the cafeteria. When you first get there, you come into this big mess hall where everybody eats. All the people eat in this big mess hall. The intake people, the new people, eat at one table. I came with two other gay brothers. And we were sitting at the table and, like, my name was known throughout the institution before I got there for all the shit that I'd been doing. This fellow reached over and grabbed my ass. I turned around and said, “Don't touch me. Don't put your hands on me, 'cause you don't know me.” And we went through this big argument. I jumped up and took my tray and threw it in his face. It was just the thing to do. We had to defend ourselves and we had these reputations to hold. Otherwise we really would have been fucked over. So I threw the tray in his face. They shot tear gas into the mess hall. The first person they ran to grab while the tear gas was settling, the first person they're carrying out to the hole, my first day there, was me. They just lifted me up and drug me out and threw me in the hole.

It's true that in jail straight men force people into homosexuality, but most of the gay people who were overt about it were all put into the same area together, or on the same tier, so we didn't have as much of that. Anyone wanting to attack one gay person would have to fight thirty or forty others first. But on the other tiers, one boy was gang-raped thirteen times, and nobody in the institution knew about it other than the inmates—he wouldn't tell the officials because he would really have been in trouble then. Finally we got

him to admit his homosexuality and come over to our tier so that he wouldn't be gang-raped. There's a lot of that; I think institutions encourage things like gang rapes by keeping the tension between homosexuals and straight people there. I don't feel we should be segregated from straight men. If men are straight they won't relate to me sexually anyway, so I won't have any problems with them, right? So I think that they encourage it by keeping us separate, and then keeping all straight men together to do their thing and calling it mass homosexual uprising and shit like that.

Every once in a while you'd hear someone was raped over on another tier. But as far as our tier was concerned, they put about forty homosexuals and about as many supposedly liberal heterosexuals—men, you know, with the role of men, and homosexuals with the role of women—on the tier together. Nobody would even utter faggot, even the guards were very careful about what they said. I was playing a role, a passive, feminine role. Had I not played a passive role and gone into the institution and been put on a straight tier, and had a homosexual relationship with one person on that tier, the whole tier would have known about it, and I would have had to have homosexual relationships with everyone on that tier because I was an overt outlet, so to speak. I think that's how a lot of the gang rapes are caused, by homosexuals going in with these superman attitudes about how butch they are and they get up there and have a relationship with one person, only it's *not* with one person, so it ends up where someone else will come up to him and proposition him or something, and he'll refuse it, and that's when he's gang-raped. I would not advise any homosexual to go in there with a superman attitude, because some of the biggest, most muscular, most macho masculine-identified men go into prison. I don't care how big you are, or how tough you are, it just happens that you'll get raped if you don't go along with the program. That's all.

At that time, I didn't identify those people on our tier who played the roles of men as homosexuals. I was into a role thing, where I was a homosexual and he was a straight man, and I related to him that way. My consciousness is entirely different now. I think that

having to play those roles was extremely oppressive for many of us. In fact, that's why so many of us kept returning to the institution. Sometimes you'd see someone who left two days earlier walking right back in there. He'd go out and start prostituting, or ripping somebody off. A lot of them had intentions of being caught and going back to jail because of relationships there.

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I finally graduated from grammar school in St. Charles. I took a test and somehow I passed it, and they handed me a diploma. When I got out on independent parole I went to a General Equivalency Diploma test office, and passed that too. I got a high-enough score to get a scholarship to college.

College was another whole trip. What school did for me was put me in the same type of oppressive situation, but in a more bourgeois sense, so I'd be able to get a half-assed job after I graduated, supporting the system. But in fact I wouldn't be able to get a job, because the record I had was tremendous. I was so oppressed I couldn't even see that I'd never be able to teach, I'd never be able to go through school and teach high school students or children or adults or anybody because of my criminal record. But all I was concerned with at the time was getting that diploma because that made me a part of the system, could make me some money.

I met lots of gay people in college. Most gay people in college that I know just stay in their closets and don't let anybody know. That's true for the people I knew in school, until Gay Liberation and Third World Gay Revolution came out. Those people in school were very closeted people.

Basically, I've always thought of myself as a revolutionary. When I was in jail I was a revolutionary, because I was rejecting the system. Only I was rejecting the system in a negative sense, in that I was not using my rejection constructively to turn it against the system. I've always had ideas of offing repression. As early as I can



remember, people have been fucking over my head, and I've always had a desire to stop people from fucking over my head.

There was quite a movement in jail between black people around Malcolm X. I was in jail when I first heard about the Black Panther party, and related to it very positively, but out of a black sense, not out of a gay sense, because they were offing gay people, verbally offing gay people, saying things like "this white man who is fucking you over is a faggot," and that was getting to me, because I was a faggot and I wasn't no white man! Finally their consciousness has changed somehow, and they've begun to relate to homosexuals as people, as a part of the people. That's when I really became a revolutionary, began to live my whole life as a revolutionary. And I could never ever consider another . . . now that I'm conscious of my oppression I could not consider any other . . . If there was a movement to restore capitalism in this country and they offed every revolutionary, they'd have to off me too. If they restore black capitalism in this country they'd have to off me too. That's going to be oppressing me as a black, gay person.

I'm really struggling right now with developing my own gay consciousness. I think that most of the people in Third World Gay Revolution and in Gay Liberation are developing their own consciousness, and trying to relate to other consciousness-raising issues. I think that more and more third world and also white people are coming into the movement because they know they'll have a fighting chance somewhere to be gay people, whether they're third world or white, so they're going to get in there and struggle for it.

I think the people I still have the most difficulty understanding are white people. I still feel a lot of negative things about white people because of their basic racism and the extreme racism which they bring down on the black community and on black people. I really feel that straight white people bring about this whole shit. I think the thing that I'm able to see better is the gay white person's point of view, and I'm able to identify—I have something to identify with in a white gay person, in a revolutionary sense, because I'm able to see that they're oppressed as gay people also. I definitely feel

that I still don't understand straight white people. I hope I will, but I don't think I'll ever be able to understand straight white people. I feel that they've created all this shit—straight white MEN in particular. Since the women's liberation movement, I've begun to relate more closely to white women, and understand their oppression, because it sort of parallels gay oppression in many ways, and I'm sort of able to understand straight white women because they're sort of able to understand gay black men, to understand their gayness. I still feel that a lot of straight white women don't understand gay black men as far as their blackness is concerned; women's liberation still has an awful lot of racism to deal with. And gay black men and gay white men have an awful lot of consciousness raising to do before they can understand women's oppression. We have to really deal with sexism. That's really a strange thing to think about—that you're oppressed in a sexist way, and that you have to raise your own consciousness on sexism. But I can see it, because black people are consistently raising their own consciousness about their blackness, and so that's how I relate to it.

## TOMMI AVICOLLI MECCA

*Tommi Avicoli Mecca is a writer, activist, performer, and the editor of Smash the Church, Smash the State: The Early Years of Gay Liberation. A participant in GLF, GAA, and the Radical Queens, in this essay he discusses the dangers faced by drag and street queens in Philadelphia in the 1970s.*

### “Brushes with Lily Law”

To be a street queen in Philadelphia in the early '70s was to know the police and the prison system intimately. Even gay men who weren't effeminate or didn't run around in drag understood that they could end up in jail anytime they stepped into a gay bar. It was illegal in many states, including Pennsylvania, to serve alcohol to a homosexual.

Police raided gay bars when the owners didn't come through with their payoffs or around election time, so that politicians could prove they were “cleaning up” so-called vice. In big cities today, politicians go after the homeless in the same way whenever they need to win points with their base. Payoffs were how those institutions—which were breaking the law every time they served a drink, even a beer, to a homo—stayed open and relatively safe from police harassment.

I was in my first bar raid when I was 19 or 20. I was carrying my older brother's expired driver's license. My brother and I looked like twins except that he had lighter hair. Both floors of the dark, narrow bar were packed to the gills with white gay men. Women, drag queens, and blacks were usually asked to show multiple pieces of identification or were refused admission outright—as in, “Sorry, no women allowed.” I didn't know at the time that a year later I would be picketing that bar with the Gay Activists Alliance because of its

sexist, transphobic, and racist policy. That day, I was sporting long hair, which was popular at the time, and standard dress: jeans and a T-shirt. I hadn't started doing drag yet.

I wasn't there long when the music suddenly stopped and the lights came on. Someone yelled, "It's the cops!" I had heard about bar raids. I knew I had to escape. I ducked into the kitchen and told a worker that I was underage. He let me out the back door into an alley. I climbed over a fence to safety.

I watched from across the street as patrons were led into the paddy wagon. I was relieved for myself but pissed off as hell at what the boys in blue were doing to my queer brothers. When you got arrested in a bar raid, your name and address ended up in the local newspaper. Many men had their lives and careers ruined by bar raids, even though the charges were eventually dropped.

Then there were the tearooms—public bathrooms that gay men cruised for sex. A tearoom could be in a department store, a university, a rest stop along a highway, or just about anywhere else that men went to relieve themselves. Long before Republican Senator Larry Craig of Idaho walked into that airport bathroom in Minnesota, gay men were signaling each other in stalls and at sinks.

I visited my first tearoom shortly after coming out at Temple University, where I went to school to avoid the draft. It was at the top of a building that housed several student lounges. An old stone building that had the somber appearance of another era, far removed from the freewheeling early '70s. While tearooms were the antithesis of the spirit of the sexual revolution, which advocated free love out in the open, they served the practical function of giving married and closeted men a place to indulge their hidden desires. Not to mention members of the faculty.

The university generally maintained a hands-off policy, especially with the bathroom on the uppermost floor. Except when a student complained. Even then, the university generally didn't call in the city police; a security guard was posted outside the facility to discourage sexual activity. Other establishments, especially department stores, did notify the local boys in blue (there were no female officers in those days). Highway patrol officers dragged off to

jail gay men caught at highway stop bathrooms. Vice squad officers went undercover to entrap men making passes at them, then led them away in handcuffs. It was risky being a gay man. Being a queen was even more dangerous. I had been anything but a butch kid. Growing up in South Philly's Little Italy, I was often ostracized for not being a Guido boy. Or at least an Italian stallion wannabe. I survived the name-calling and the feeling of being an outsider in my own family and neighborhood: I found community in the Gay Liberation Front at Temple.

Many of the gay liberationists I met were into radical drag (also known as genderfuck), a form of political dress that mocked traditional gender roles. Its purposes were to show people how arbitrary gender-specific dress and behavior were and to free up men and women to be themselves. Why did men have to be macho and women weak? Why couldn't women earn the bacon and men stay home and take care of the kids? Before long, I was running around in full flaming radical drag: Long, frizzy "straightened" hair, hot pants, blouses, makeup, and colorful platform shoes. I looked like a cross between Bette Midler and the New York Dolls. I elicited an interesting assortment of responses as I made my way down the street to my favorite hangout, even in the gay male area of town. Queens had their own area, separate from the gay-boy bars. It was nicknamed the "drag strip" even though it was shared by female hookers and male hustlers. The center of its universe was Dewey's, a 24-hour diner that at times could have been a transgender community center. Queens hung out there at all hours of the day and night, sitting alone at the counter or in groups at the tables along the sides of the room. From what I heard, queens carved out that bit of space for themselves because they were not welcomed in the gay-boy bars or cruising areas.

Those gay boys had no sense of history. If they did, they would have known that for many years, starting in the dark ages of the late '50s, queens marched on Halloween night in a defiant display of pride. They assembled at a certain bar (I don't know the name of it) and strutted through the streets of the center of town, putting on a show for the straights who would gather from as far away as the

surrounding suburbs. Police Captain Frank Rizzo (who would become police commissioner and then mayor with a widespread reputation for *spacco il capo*, or splitting heads) put a stop to the Halloween marches in the mid-'60s. "Philly's Finest" had a tradition of roughing up the queens along the drag strip. The gay boys didn't seem to care about that abuse, nor did they understand that queens in New York had recently rioted and given birth to a movement that would soon end the police raids and the entrapment in tearooms and public sex areas.

I didn't quite fit into the scene along the drag strip. Many of the other queens considered me a freak because I didn't want to pass as a woman, nor did I want a sex change. I regularly lectured them about redistributing the wealth and other Marxist and anarchist ideas. They nodded politely, sometimes even offered comments, but generally stared at me blankly. I was the '70s version of a nerd. And I wasn't a prostitute. Many times, guys offered me money to go home with them. I usually refused. I was working at a record store run by hippies who accepted my unconventional looks (they thought I was trying to be David Bowie), and I didn't need to sell my body to pay the rent or buy food. More importantly, I didn't trust the guys who approached me. Any john could be an undercover vice cop.

I was terrified of being arrested and thrown in jail. Not only because my Southern Italian *famiglia* would have to come bail me out, but also because I had heard too many horror stories from the older queens. They told of being beaten and sometimes even raped in prison. They described sexual favors they were forced to perform for some of the officers. They were resigned to the fact that every once in a while (especially around election time), the cops came around and "cleaned up" the neighborhood, and off they went to spend time behind bars.

An old queen once showed me a scar she got from resisting arrest in her younger days. It was a mark of pride, but I could still see the pain in her eyes. She had been a hooker for a long time and all the cops knew her well. That didn't stop them from tossing her in a cell when it suited them. Prostitution wasn't the only thing that the cops

had over our heads. They also used a state law that prohibited “impersonating the opposite sex,” which meant that if you weren’t wearing two articles of clothing of your “appropriate” gender, you could be hauled off to prison. I usually wore my Fruit of the Loom briefs, but no other item that could be considered “male.” I could have argued, I guess, that my glitter socks or platform shoes were “unisex,” as we called them, and therefore technically not “female.” It wouldn’t have saved me. Philly cops didn’t look favorably on that particular fashion trend. I hated cops.

When I was in high school, I fell madly in love with this guy in my class. He and I would do homework at his house. It was a chance to be together. Coming home late sometimes, I’d be stopped by cops who thought, as they put it, that I “looked like someone” who had just committed a crime: Ethnic profiling before it was called that. No doubt the description in the police bulletin said “Italian.” I had a “Roman nose,” therefore I must be a criminal. To my uncle the cop, I was something even worse. When I worked at the gas station that my father operated with his oldest brother, Uncle Cop always needled me about being effeminate. He loved to do it in front of the old guys who hung out at the station. He’d yell across the driveway while I was washing a car: “When’re you gonna start acting like a boy!” It achieved its effect: I was totally humiliated. I tried to ignore him, but he kept at it until he was distracted by something else or until I walked off to the bathroom.

At family gatherings, my uncle bragged about beating up the queens along the drag strip. Fortunately, by the time I was hanging out in that area, he had been transferred to another police precinct.

On the drag strip, I had one very close brush with “Lily Law,” or “Alice,” as we called the cops. I don’t know where “Lily Law,” came from, but “Alice,” or “Alice Bluegown,” was the invention of a very loud and proud queen named Alice who used it to signal the other queens when they needed to stop what they were doing. One night on the “merry-go-round,” a gay cruising area, I was in a dark alley about to go down on someone when I heard, “Alice!” I took off. Sure enough, a cop car was circling the block.

I wasn't so lucky that summer night on the drag strip. I was talking to a john. I wasn't really going to do anything with him. I liked the fact that he kept telling me how pretty I was, but I had no intention of going off with him. A cop car pulled up to the curb. The john fled. He didn't need to worry; the police would never have arrested him. "Get in," the police officer said. He was standard-issue white Anglo. My heart started pumping harder. I knew I had to stay calm. I got in the car, sitting as close to the door as I could, in case I had to make an escape. Of course that would only make me look guiltier.

"Let me see your ID," he said. I handed it to him.

"Avicolli? You related to . . . ?

"Yeah, he's my uncle," I said.

"Does he know?"

"No."

He didn't say anything for the longest time. He handed the card back to me. I wanted to beg him to not say anything to my uncle, but I was too scared to talk. I was willing to do anything to avoid being booked. He seemed to be considering something. A blowjob would be a fair exchange for my freedom. He wasn't that bad looking.

"You know this is a dangerous neighborhood," he said.

I was barely breathing, trying to be as still and silent as possible.

"I should take you in." He paused. "But your uncle's a good guy. He don't deserve this."

He was obviously conflicted: duty versus loyalty to a fellow officer. I remained frozen. I figured it best to keep quiet.

"Get outta here," he said, "and don't let me see you out there no more."

I was out of that car before he could reconsider. As I walked back to Dewey's, some of the girls asked me what happened. I just shook my head and kept going. I went straight past the restaurant and toward the bus stop. When the bus pulled up, I got on and sat in the back, still trembling.

Uncle Cop had saved my queer ass.



# PENNY ARCADE

*Writer and performer Penny Arcade has been a force in avant-garde theater since the 1960s, working with John Vaccaro's Playhouse of the Ridiculous, Charles Ludlam, and Jack Smith, among many others. In this monologue from her performance piece Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!, she decries conservatism and assimilationist tendencies in the LGBTQ movement.*

## *From Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!*

In 1964 when I was 14 years old I was taken in by gay men. When I tell people that I was raised by gay men, no one ever knows what I'm talking about. You see, people have such a PBS vision of male homosexuality at this point that when I tell people that I was raised by gay men, they actually think it means that my father came out, he left my mother; he moved in with his lover; I stayed there on weekends and they took me to the opera. That's strictly a post-'80s phenomena! When I say that I was raised by gay men, I mean that I was taken in by a tawdry band of drag queens and their minions and that I am who I am today because of those gay men. I wear this dress in honor of the gay men who raised me. The gay men who raised me couldn't wait to see me in dresses like this. Me, I hate dresses like this. Well for one thing it's made of glass beads, it weighs ten pounds, and if I got tired and leaned against a wall I could get severe lacerations. You see, the thing is that no matter who you're raised by when you're a teenager, you will rebel. This is a law. And being raised by gay men, I drew the line at Judy Garland and Barbra Streisand. "I don't want to listen to 'Somewhere over the Rainbow'! I want to listen to the Rolling Stones! I don't want to

listen to 'Funny Girl' again. Nobody else I know has to listen to 'Funny Girl' over and over and over and over!"

I fell in love with a lot of those gay men. And a lot of those gay men fell in love with me. And we'd go out cruising every single night. And at dawn we'd come home empty-handed and sleep in the same bed. But we had to sleep like this and not even touch 'cause I had these and that was yucky for them and I had this and that was worse. But by 1968 when I was 18 years old, I stopped trying to fuck fags. I caught on.

People have a lot of strange ideas about eroticism. But when I talk about eroticism, I'm not talking about this or this or this or this or whatever it is that you happen to do in bed. I'm talking about the life force . . . the only energy that any of us have, and it happens to be sexual. I mean it's not like we have walking the Highline energy, and then reading the Sunday *Times* energy and then going out to the Farmers Market energy and streaming a video energy and then some other separate energy that we use for sex. There's just one energy and it's sexual. And the thing that's kind of funny and kind of sad is that none of us, not one single person in this entire room is ever going to be as sexual as we all were when we were two and a half years old. Have you ever been with a two-and-a-half-year-old kid that likes you? They're just, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah. . . . They want you with every little cell in their body. They're not trying to figure out what they're gonna get you to do in bed later.

In 1971, I was living on this island in Spain called Formentera and there was absolutely no scene of any kind. There's just a few old goat ladies and a few fishermen. And then my friend Richard went to visit New York and when he came back I said, "Well, Richard, what's going on in New York?!" And he said, "Well, Penny, fags are fucking girls now!" I said, "Oh, I guess I was ahead of my time!" And then in 1973, he invited me to visit him on Fire Island, the gayest resort in America. And I didn't even care that I had to take the subway and the train and the ferry and it was gonna take hours and hours to get there because I figured that I was gonna meet some really funny gay men and we were gonna laugh and laugh.

But when I got on the ferry, nobody would talk to me. I mean they wouldn't even look at me. After a while I realized they only seemed to have eyes for each other. Then I realized that they all looked alike. I mean exactly alike. There wasn't one man without a mustache on the whole boat. There wasn't one drag queen! When I got off the boat Richard was waiting for me on the pier and he said, "Well, Penny, how was your trip over?" And I said, "Actually, Richard, nobody would talk to me." And he said, "Penny, that's how it is now. It's all about sex for gay men now. Faghags are obsolete." And I stood on the pier and I yelled . . .

"I'm sorry I threw bricks at the Stonewall! I'm sorry I helped invent gay liberation!" And Richard yelled, "Me too! Me too!"

I was a Faghag when to be a Faghag was a glorious thing! We weren't simply extending somebody's fashion statement then. We weren't considered mere accessories. Faghags made it possible for gay men to move in straight society. Faghags were hiding gay men in plain sight. Faghags were like certain Christians who hid Jews in their attics during the Holocaust. And in 1973 more gay men came out than ever, but they were so straight. And things got so bad that I had to start talking to other Faghags. Well everyone knows that faghags don't actually talk to each other. I mean if you want to have two Faghags at one table, you have to have ten fags. Look around, it's always: five fags, one Faghag, five fags, one Faghag.

And these new gay men in 1973, they didn't like to camp it up. They didn't like to dish. They didn't like to dance. They hated fashion. They hated art. They hated politics. They hated drag queens. They hated Faghags. They hated women. They hated dykes. They hated effeminate men. All these guys wanted to do was go in the bushes and fuck—just like heterosexual guys.

Ten years ago I faced the hideous truth about myself, that I didn't deserve anything. That I wasn't worth anything. And that no one could ever love me. It was a big relief. It was. I mean that's what I've been running away from my whole life. That's what I've been hiding from myself my whole life; that was what I was trying to hide from you! Then I realized that I really wanted was to be loved. Then I realized that everybody wants to be loved. Boring, annoying, cloying

people want to be loved. Negative, self-centered, arrogant people want to be loved. People who hiss at you on the street, “Pssst, pssst, pssst, pssst, pssst, pssst!” These people . . . they want to be loved. They think that they just want to fuck you, but in reality they want to be loved. And generation after generation, nobody seems to get the love they need. Most of us can’t get it from our parents ’cause our parents didn’t get it from their parents.

And I know that we should all be running through the streets with more joy and more happiness than we can possibly contain, with more sheer excitement, just at being alive, but instead most of us live lives of constant deprivation. We all want to be loved and we all want to feel the full erotic wave of our love . . . like when we’re dancing. Of course! It only makes sense!

Then in the late ’70s people started coming out of the closet and immediately formed committees telling the rest of us what we could say and what we could do! People who dragged their feet coming out of the closet suddenly wanted to give orders to the rest of us who had never been in the closet! They became word police. They had meetings where they decided we couldn’t say fag, or dyke, or queer! They were against Drag Queens. They said drag disrespected women.

And every decade since, that kind of language policing keeps getting more restrictive.

It made me sick of gay pride. I wanted to return to gay shame. I wanted those people to go back in the closet!

The queer backlash wasn’t against heterosexuals. It was against those control freaks in the gay community who wanted to be accepted by the white middle class. They wanted to be officially Gay.

But now they don’t want to be gay anymore, now they all want to be queer.

Well, they’re not queer! Queer means that you have no friends. Queer means you have suffered a period of exclusion, isolation, and rejection so profound that it marks you as an outsider forever. Losers, freaks, and misfits created gay liberation.

Then in 1980 I started meeting these new gay boys. They were half in drag! They were friends with Lesbians, bisexuals,

heterosexuals! They were not judging people on their sexual orientation! They knew the whole history that had come before them. They knew the names of all the drag queens who had come before them . . . Jackie Curtis, Holly Woodlawn, Candy Darling, Alexis Del Lago, International Chrysis, Francis Francine, Margo Howard-Howard, Flawless Mother Sabrina, Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson. Marsha P. Johnson. The “P” stood for “Pay it no mind!”

The Stonewall Uprising started when a cop grabbed a drag queen’s face and turned it to the light to see if it was a man or a woman, and if you know anything about Drag Queens you know you never, never touch a Drag Queen’s face! Never!

# JILL JOHNSTON

*Jill Johnston was a radical feminist and cultural critic who wrote extensively for the Village Voice. Her stream-of-consciousness manifesto, "On a Clear Day You Can See Your Mother," was originally written for a town hall debate with Norman Mailer, Jacqueline Ceballos, Germaine Greer, and Diana Trilling and was later revised for her collection Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution.*

## From *Lesbian Nation*

### ON A CLEAR DAY YOU CAN SEE YOUR MOTHER

*Some old lines and some new ones thrown onto each other for the town hall affair*

The title of this episode is a new approach: All women are lesbians except those who don't know it naturally they are but don't know it yet I am a woman who is a lesbian because I am a woman and a woman who loves herself naturally who is other women is a lesbian a woman who loves women loves herself naturally this is the case that a woman is herself is all woman is a natural born lesbian so we don't mind using the name like any name it is quite meaningless it means naturally I am a woman and whatever I am we are we affirm being what we are the way of course all men are homosexuals being having a more sense of their homo their homo-ness their ecce homo-ness their ecce prince & lord & master-ness the 350 years of Abraham intersample Abraham lived for 350 years because the Bible ages are only a succession of sons and fathers and grandfathers intensely identifying with their ancestors their son so identified naturely with the father that he believed he was the father

and of course he was as was Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Esau and Reuben and Simeon and Levi and Judah and Joseph each one lived for 350 years, but who are the daughters of Rachel and Ruth and Sarah and Rebekah the rest we do not know the daughters never had any daughters they had only sons who begat more sons and sons so we have very little sense, from that particular book, of the lineage and ligaments and legacies and identities of mothers and daughters and their daughters and their mothers and mothers and daughters and sisters who were naturally not lesbians if they had nothing of each other save sons so now we must say Verily Verily, I say unto thee, except a woman be born again she cannot see the Kingdom of Goddess a woman must be born again to be herself her own eminence and grace the queen queen-self whose mother has pressed upon her mouth innumerable passionate kisses so sigh us. . . . There is in every perfect love / A law to be accomplished too: that the lover should resemble / The belov'd: And be the same. And the greater is the likeness / Brighter will the rapture flame—even as John there St. John of the Cross raptured on his pal Jesus whose son he was his father his son as when Jesus in another time said to his lovers and haven't you heard it a deluge of times And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And straightway they left their nets, and followed him. Ah lover and perfect equal! I meant that you should discover me so, by my faint indirection; And I, when I meet you, mean to discover you by the like in you . . . I want she who is the tomboy in me . . . I want she who is very female in me . . . I want she who is British about me . . . I want she who is ugly American about me . . . I want she who is mayonnaise about me . . . I want she who is the cunt and the balls and the breasts of me and the long straight brown hair and the gangly boarding school adolescent in a navy blue blazer and gold buttons of me . . . narcissme, qui consiste a se choisir soi-meme comme objet erotique . . . and I want the men to carry my boxes of books for me and carry me upsy daily pigback and pay for me everywhere and adore me as a lesberated woman . . . Over the inevitable we shall not grieve . . . This is the body that Jill built . . . Ecce Leda the Lesbian . . . Ecce Greta the Gay the gay Gertrude the

gay gay gayness of being gay, of being, to be equal we have to become who we really are and women we will never be equal women until we love one another women and say Woe, and behold, a voice from Hera saying This is my beloved daughter in whom I am well pleased O Women of America the World you are your own best friend, your own closest friend, you are the best company for yourself . . . you should go through and study even right back to your childhood, and of course if you have the great ability to go back to your previous lives you should do so Women of America the World you are your own best friend . . . These are the series of sayings we are saving the world with: the lamentations of Mary and Marilyn Monroe. Lord help you, Maria, full of grease, the load is with me! Her smile is between her legs and her mustache is in her armpit and she ordered that history should begin with her with her this is a muster of elephantal consequence the lost and fundamental situation of the feminine is the primordial relation of identity between mother and daughter the mysteries of Eleusis of the reunion of Demeter and her daughter Persephone to be born again and again and Arethusa and Artemis and Hebe and Hera and Diana and Daphne and Doris and Dora and Dolly and the Danaides all but one murdered their husbands on their wedding nights our case revives their stories for more than a hundred years I wander about in it without coming to the end of her body the most we can do is to dream the myth onwards, and rewrite the stories we will reunite Electra and her mother Clytemnestra and Jocasta will be well pleased in her daughter Antigone who will be more involved in her mothers and her daughters than in the proper burial for her brother and we will remember the histories of say how Eleanor of Aquitaine made a crusade to the holy land and dressed all her ladies in waiting as Amazons in leopard skins and dressed herself as Pan Athenea and that's how they rode through Greece for the queendom of heaven is as a woman traveling into a far country who called her own servants and delivered unto them *her* goods for Whole the World to see a woman finds pleasure in caressing a body whose secrets she knows, her own body giving her the clue to its preferences giving each the other their sense of self tracing the body



of the woman whose fingers in turn trace her body that the miracle of the mirror be accomplished between women love is contemplative caresses are intended less to gain possession of the other than gradually to recreate the self thru her own self among the women and the women the multitude on the way to the way the world was before it began it is now the world is heading definitely toward a matriarchy more often to return to the source of things we must travel in the opposite direction, Wring out the clothes! Wring in the dew! Before all the king's Hoarsers with all the Queens Mum Her birth is uncontrollable and her organ is working perfectly and there's a part that's not screwed on and her education is now for by and about women and presided over by woman All women are lesbians except those who don't know it of course since whereas both sexes (even as Sigmund sd) are originally more attached to the mother and it is the *task* of the girl to transfer this attachment to the father naturally they we are but don't know it yet that woman is now approaching her ancient destiny as woman I am and therefore lesbian which means nothing we could say it over and over again over

lesbianlesbianlesbianlesbianlesbianlesbianlesbianlesbianlesbian—Special from the White House, the President of the United States announced last night the appointment of a lesbian to his cabinet . . . it's nice if you can invite them in, they usually come in without knocking . . . Womens lib and let lib new official position on lesbians: Hey ladies it's okay, like Red China is there so we might as well recognize it . . . yupyop . . . Liberal Schmiberal . . . Maybe . . . uh . . . we should invite . . . uh . . . her . . . uh . . . one of them to dinner . . . One of what, dear? Uh, well, uh, she is a bit odd isn't she? I mean, you know how we'd feel if a black man was interested in our daughter—Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa . . . Oh god, and she might make a pass at my wife . . . Agh . . . But if she just doesn't *talk* about what she is . . . We could pretend . . . Whaddyou say to the naked lady please please sorry thank you we are getting to the bottom of women's lib we are going down on women's lib I am beside myself with love for you when you are beside me my love the beginning of the unfirst is rite now if all thinks are at this momentum being cremated and the end

of the unihearse is right now for all thinks are at this momentus passing away we went to see the Dairy of a Skinzopretty girl O why dint her mother straighten out her teeth when she was young O she is envolved in many strange and wondrous adventures O in short she had come into that abnormal condition known as elation O she did not yet love and she loved to love; she sought what she might love, in love with loving . . . O what can she say now that is not the story of so many others O do not fail me she says you are my last chance, indeed our last chance, to save the West . . . and who wants the Moon ven ve can land on Venus . . . and O how would you like to be the heroine of yr own life story (she's looking forward to it extremely) and O don't be nervous be mermaid be she whom I love who travels with me and sits along while holding me by the hand she ahold of my hand has completely satisfied me o natural woman woman vimmin virmin woreman woeman of America the World until until women all the women see in each other the possibility of a primal commitment which includes sexual love they will be denying themselves the love and value they have readily accorded to men, thus affirming their second class status for within the heterosexual institution no woman can be the equal it is a contrafiction in terms the heterosexual institution is a male institution a homo ecce homo institution and you can't ever change the absoluteness the institution is political is built out of the institutionalized slavery of women so it is a contradiction in terms—such an institution must only collapse of its own accord from within the heterosexual institution is over spiritually over and the new thing now that is happening is the withdrawal of women to give each other their own sense of self a new sense of self until women see in each other the possibility of a primal commitment which includes sexual love they will be denying themselves the love and value they readily accord to men thus affirming their second class status. *Until all women are lesbians there will be no true political revolution* until in other same words we are woman I am a woman who loves herself naturally who is other women is a lesbian a woman who loves women loves herself naturally this is the case that a woman is herself is all woman is a natural born lesbian so we

don't mind using the name it means naturely I am a woman and whatever I am we are we affirm being what we are saying therefore *Until all women are lesbians there will be no true political revolution* meaning the terminus of the heterosexual institution through the recollection by woman of her womanhood her own grace and eminence by the intense identities of our ancestors our descendants of the mothers and the daughters and the grandmothers we become who we are which is to say we become our own identities and autonomies even as now we are so but except those who don't know it yet will be quite upset about it for some time to come as I would more properly be as majorities would have it leaning on my sword describing my defeat some women want to have their cock and eat it too and lesbian is a label invented by anybody to throw at any woman who dares to be a man's equal and lesbian is a good name it means nothing of course or everything so we don't mind using the name in face we like it for we can be proud to claim allusion to the island made famous by Sappho the birds are talking to us in Greek again and continue on making a big thing out of it over all these centuries time we can do that we don't mind it's nice in fact for we all all of us women are lesbians why not and isn't it wonderful what a lot of devotion there is to us lying around the universe especially to those all envolved in some penis they're wrapping their cunts around. . . . Oh well . . . Lillian over and out . . . he sd I want your body and she sd you can have it when I'm through with it . . . Keep yer hands off me you worldwide weirdo, I just want to be noticed, not attacked—we had a big argonaut about it . . . The age of shrivelry is abonus again . . . A Lord was not considered defeated in a local war until his flag had fallen from the main tower of his castle . . . svastickles falling outen da sky . . . the current dispute would be settled if the central figure was no longer present (*at this moment our leader Norman Mailer akst me to read my last line and I said I'd like to forgo the question and my friends appeared on stage and I made love before notables and my circuitry got overloaded and the men in the audience voted they dint want to hear me no more and I don't remember too much except leaving and wishing later I'd kissed Germaine before we*

*walked off*) . . . Flash from the White House: last night the President of the United States, clad only in a scanty tribal costume, announced the resignation of the American Government . . . His life was an empty record of gambling cockfighting titting balls and masques vimmin and vine clothes . . . Better latent than never . . . aliquem alium interum . . . there's no such thing as sexual differentiation in the spiritual nature of wo(man) . . . This is the problem passion play of the millentury . . . O this Restoration Comedy—it's going to be a beautiful reunion . . . plunderpussy and all spoiled goods going into her nabsack and some heroine women in wings of Samothrace . . . Is it to drown her passengers that you have bored a hole in her? Rubbish, what bunkum these people talk . . . Events are preshipitaking themselves in the harpiest confusion . . . cunnilinguist . . . Listen. If you recognized an aspect of yourself that you love in these ancient new womens heads I too have recognized an admirable aspect of myself in your willingness to be as beautiful as you are who you are My mother was a vestal, my father I knew not no prince nor lord nor master-ness but the nipples and navels of the whirld a wonderwoman the mothers and the daughters and the great grandmothers and daughters of Rachel and Ruth and Sarah and Rebekah the rest we will know now the daughter the mothers and sisters will have daughters who beget daughters so we will more sense, from this time, of the lineage and ligaments and legacies and identities of our mothers and daughters and their mothers and mothers and daughters and sisters who are naturally of course lesbians if they have of each other and saying Verily Verily except a woman must be born again she cannot see the Queendom of Goddess a woman must be born again to be herself her own eminence and grace the queen queenself whose mother has pressed upon her mouth innumerable passionate kisses . . . Sail away where the wind blows sweet . . . and take a sister by her hand . . . Lead her far from this barren land . . . ON A CLEAR DAY YOU CAN SEE YOUR MOTHER.

## JOHN E. FRYER, MD

*John E. Fryer was a gay psychiatrist who dared to speak on a panel about homosexuality, along with Frank Kameny and Barbara Gittings, at the 1972 meeting of the American Psychiatric Association. Fearing for his professional career, Fryer spoke as “Dr. Henry Anonymous,” wearing a mask and using a distorting microphone to disguise his voice. It was a key moment in the psychiatric profession’s treatment of homosexuality that helped lead to the declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness.*

### From “John E. Fryer, MD, and the Dr. H. Anonymous Episode”

Returning to my story, after my residency, I was pretty well-known by everyone at that point as being gay. I became part of [what we called] the Gay-P-A, a loose underground network of closeted gay psychiatrists who regularly attended the annual meetings of the American Psychiatric Association. In 1970, at the APA meeting in San Francisco, all of us watched Barbara Gittings (a Philadelphia activist who headed the gay component of the American Library Association) and Frank Kameny, PhD (an acerbic Harvard-trained astronomer from Washington, D.C.), picketing the APA. We in the Gay-P-A commented, “Isn’t that nice,” but we weren’t about to do anything that might expose us.

So what happened back there in 1972? After [she crashed] the APA’s Convocation of Fellows in Washington, D.C., in 1970, the APA asked Barbara Gittings to be part of the panel “Lifestyles of Non-Patient Homosexuals.” Barbara’s lover, Kay Lahusen, noted that the panel had gays who were not psychiatrists and psychiatrists who were not gay. She said, “What we really need is a psychiatrist who is

gay.” Barbara decided to get letters from several gay psychiatrists, which were to be read without their names.

In the summer of 1970, my father died, which focused me on my death and dying work at that time. In that process I developed a friendship with a man with whom I later got involved intimately. In November 1971 I visited his home in New Hampshire when Barbara Gittings called and said, “John, we need you to be on a panel [in May 1972],” and I said, “Tell me about it.” She said, “It’s going to be a panel about homosexuality, and we need a gay psychiatrist.” I said, “Sooo . . . ?!” She responded, “Well, look, you . . . um . . . think about it.” She said that the Maurice Falk foundation out of Pittsburgh had provided a grant to pay the travel expenses of a psychiatrist to be on a panel with Barbara Gittings, Judd Marmor, Robert Seidenberg, and a psychiatrist from Sheppard Pratt psychiatric hospital, Kent Robinson. They wanted someone on the panel who was gay.

In 1971 I was not feeling very secure. I was not [employed] full-time anywhere. I was only on the clinical faculty at Temple and did not have tenure. But I thought about it and realized it was something that had to be done. I had been thrown out of a residency because I was gay; I had lost a job because I was gay. That perspective needed to be heard from a gay psychiatrist by an audience that perhaps might be more inclined to listen to a psychiatrist. I told Barbara that I would participate on the panel but I could not do it as me. I didn’t feel secure enough. Barbara asked what had to be done so that I could be on the committee. She then agreed to help me with a disguise.

Now, when you’re my size, coming up with a disguise is not always easy. Fortunately, my lover at that time was a drama major and, with his assistance, we created an outfit. I wore this formal outfit that was several sizes too big with a blue shirt, and I had a rubber mask that went over my head that had different features from my own. My lover instructed me on how to make the mask look even more different.

The night that I was on the panel, my voice was disguised. Nobody knew who I was; the people for whom I worked didn’t know it was I.

So basically, my cover was clean. What actually I said was quite short:

Thank you, Dr. Robinson. I am a homosexual. I am a psychiatrist. I, like most of you in this room, am a member of the APA and am proud to be a member. However, tonight I am, insofar as it is possible, a “we.” I attempt tonight to speak for many of my fellow gay members of the APA as well as for myself. When we gather at these conventions, we have a group, which we have glibly come to call the Gay-P-A. And several of us feel that it is time that real flesh and blood stand up before you and ask to be listened to and understood insofar as that is possible. I am disguised tonight in order that I might speak freely without conjuring up too much regard on your part about the particular WHO I happen to be. I do that mostly for your protection. I can assure you that I could be any one of more than a hundred psychiatrists registered at this convention. And the curious among you should cease attempting to figure out who I am and listen to what I say.

We homosexual psychiatrists must persistently deal with a variety of what we shall call “Nigger Syndromes.” We shall describe some of them and how they make us feel.

As psychiatrists who are homosexual, we must know our place and what we must do to be successful. If our goal is academic appointment, a level of earning capacity equal to our fellows, or admission to a psychoanalytic institute, we must make certain that no one in a position of power is aware of our sexual orientation or gender identity. Much like the black man with the light skin who chooses to live as a white man, we cannot be seen with our real friends—our real homosexual family—lest our secret be known and our dooms sealed. There are practicing psychoanalysts among us who have completed their training analysis without mentioning their homosexuality to their analysts. Those who are willing to speak up openly will do so only if they have nothing to lose, then they won’t be listened to.

As psychiatrists who are homosexuals, we must look carefully at the power which lies in our hands to define the health of others

around us. In particular, we should have clearly in our minds our own particular understanding of what it is to be a healthy homosexual in a world which sees that appellation as an impossible oxymoron. One cannot be healthy and be homosexual, they say. One result of being psychiatrists who are homosexual is that we are required to be more healthy than our heterosexual counterparts. We have to make some sort of attempt through therapy or analysis to work problems out. Many of us who make that effort are still left with a sense of failure and of persistence of "the problem." Just as the black man must be superperson, so must we, in order to face those among our colleagues who know we are gay. We could continue to cite examples of this sort of situation for the remainder of the night. It would be useful, however, if we could now look at the reverse.

What is it like to be a homosexual who is also a psychiatrist? Most of us Gay-P-A members do not wear our badges into the Bayou Landing [a gay bar in Dallas] or the local Canal Baths. If we did, we could risk the derision of all the nonpsychiatrist homosexuals. There is much negative feeling in the homosexual community toward psychiatrists. And those of us who are visible are the easiest targets [on] which the angry can vent their wrath. Beyond that, in our own hometowns, the chances are that in any gathering of homosexuals, there is likely to be any number of patients or paraprofessional employees who might try to hurt us professionally in a larger community if those communities enable them to hurt us that way.

Finally, as homosexual psychiatrists, we seem to present a unique ability to marry ourselves to institutions rather than wives or lovers. Many of us work twenty hours daily to protect institutions that would literally chew us up and spit us out if they knew the truth. These are our feelings, and like any set of feelings, they have value insofar as they move us toward concrete action.

Here, I will speak primarily to the other members of the Gay-P-A who are present, not in costume tonight. Perhaps you can help your fellow psychiatrist friends understand what I am saying. When you are with professionals, fellow professionals, fellow psychiatrists



who are denigrating the “faggots” and the “queers,” don’t just stand back, but don’t give up your careers either. Show a little creative ingenuity; make sure you let your associates know that they have a few issues that they have to think through again. When fellow homosexuals come to you for treatment, don’t let your own problems get in your way, but develop creative ways to let the patient[s] know that they’re all right. And teach them everything they need to know. Refer them to other sources of information with basic differences from your own so that the homosexual will be freely able to make his own choices.

Finally, pull up your courage by your bootstraps and discover ways in which you and homosexual psychiatrists can be closely involved in movements which attempt to change the attitudes of heterosexuals—and homosexuals—toward homosexuality. For all of us have something to lose. We may not be considered for that professorship. The analyst down the street may stop referring us his overflow. Our supervisor may ask us to take a leave of absence. We are taking an even bigger risk, however, not accepting fully our own humanity, with all of the lessons it has to teach all the other humans around us and ourselves. This is the greatest loss: our honest humanity. And that loss leads all those others around us to lose that little bit of their humanity as well. For, if they were truly comfortable with their own homosexuality, then they could be comfortable with ours. We must use our skills and wisdom to help them—and us—grow to be comfortable with that little piece of humanity called homosexuality.

## JONATHAN NED KATZ

*Jonathan Ned Katz is a historian of LGBTQ politics and culture. His landmark study, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.*, paved the way for generations of LGBTQ historians as well as his own later works, such as *The Invention of Heterosexuality*. In the introduction, Katz speaks to gay men and lesbians coming to consciousness in the 1970s as a historical and political force.*

### *From Gay American History*

We have been the silent minority, the silenced minority—invisible women, invisible men. Early on, the alleged enormity of our “sin” justified the denial of our existence, even our physical destruction. Our “crime” was not merely against society, not only against humanity, but “against nature”—we were outlaws against the universe. Long did we remain literally and metaphorically unspeakable, “among Christians not to be named”—nameless. To speak our name, to roll that word over the tongue, was to make our existence tangible, physical; it came too close to some mystical union with us, some carnal knowledge of that “abominable” ghost, that lurking possibility within. For long, like women conceived only in relation to men, we were allowed only relative intellectual existence, conceived only in relation to, as deviants from, a minority of—an “abnormal” and embarrassing poor relation. For long we were a people perceived out of time and out of place—socially unsituated, without a history—the mutant progeny of some heterosexual union, freaks. Our existence as a long-oppressed, long-resistant social group was not explored. We remained an unknown people, our character defamed. The heterosexual dictatorship has tried to keep us out of sight and out of mind; its homosexuality

taboo has kept us in the dark. That time is over. The people of the shadows have seen the light; Gay people are coming out—and moving on—to organized action against an oppressive society.

In recent years the liberation movements of Lesbians and Gay men have politicized, given historical dimension to, and radically altered the traditional concept of homosexuality, as well as the social situation, relations, ideas, and emotions of some homosexuals. Those of us affected by this movement have experienced a basic change in our sense of self. As we acted upon our society we acted upon ourselves; as we changed the world we changed our minds; sexual subversives, we overturned our psychic states. From a sense of our homosexuality as a personal and devastating fate, a private, secret shame, we moved with often-dizzying speed to the consciousness of ourselves as members of an oppressed social group. As the personal and political came together in our lives, so it merged in our heads, and we came to see the previously hidden connections between our private lives and public selves; we were politicized, body and soul. In one quick, bright flash we experienced a secular revelation: we too were among America's mistreated. We moved in a brief span of time from a sense that there was something deeply wrong with us to the realization that there was something radically wrong with that society which had done its best to destroy us. We moved from various forms of self-negation to newfound outrage and action against those lethal conditions. From hiding our sexual and affectional natures, we moved to publicly affirm a deep and good part of our being. Starting with a sense of ourselves as characters in a closet drama, the passive victims of a family tragedy, we experienced ourselves as initiators and assertive actors in a movement for social change. We experienced the present as history, ourselves as history makers. In our lives and in our hearts, we experienced the change from one historical form of homosexuality to another. We experienced homosexuality as historical.

# ARTHUR EVANS

*A cofounder of the Gay Activists Alliance, Arthur Evans was an activist and philosopher whose books included The God of Ecstasy and Critique of Patriarchal Reason. In this passage from his book Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture, Evans uncovers the intimate connections between magic and radical LGBTQ politics.*

## *From Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*

Magic is the art of communicating with the spiritual powers in nature and in ourselves. Nature societies throughout history have known that trees, stars, rocks, the sun, and the moon are not dead objects or mere resources but living beings who communicate with us.

They have also known that there are mysterious nonrational powers within ourselves. The Christian power system, on the other hand, has taught that spirit and matter are two utterly separate categories and that spirit emanates from one being who exists above and beyond nature. Industrialism has continued this same distinction between matter and spirit, but modified it by viewing spirit as either an illusion or as a quality of certain subjective (and therefore suspect) mental states. Accordingly, we have all been told from childbirth to repress, deny, hide, and kill our natural abilities to communicate with nature spirits and our own inner spiritual energies (just as we have been told to deny and repress our sexuality). This suppression has been aided by forcing people to live in huge urban wastelands, where we scarcely even encounter nature, let alone communicate with it. Urban wastelands also atomize us, keeping us in conflict with one another and out of touch with our collective power centers.

This suppression has been very useful to the ruling classes in the industrial power system. The moon, for example, ceases to be the fateful goddess whom we worship with rituals in the silence of night and becomes instead a piece of real estate on which to plant an American or Soviet flag. Since we are kept out of touch with our real collective power centers, we have no collective entities to identify with except large, impersonal, industrial, false ones, such as the state.

Magic is inherently a collective activity, depending for its practice on group song, dance, sex, and ecstasy. It is through magic that so-called primitive societies are able to hold themselves together and function in perfect order without prisons, mental hospitals, universities, or the institution of the state. Until very recently in history, magic was the birthright of every human being. It is only within the last few hundred years that whole societies have come into being where people live magicless lives.

Magic is one of our most powerful allies in the struggle against patriarchal industrialism. One reason, as we've just seen, is that magic holds our work collectives together and gives us great inner power. But there is a second reason. Patriarchal industrialism has come to power not only by suppressing and killing great numbers of people, but also by violating nature. No one has ever fully recorded (or could record) the atrocities of industrialism against the animal people or the plant people. From the annihilation of animals for their furs in early colonial America to the widespread and grotesque experimentation on animals in the present, industrialism in America has utterly decimated the animal kingdoms. In addition, industrial society in general, in all times and places, has blackened the whole environment and viewed nature as something to conquer. Indeed, throughout its range in time and space, the entire Christian/industrial system has been one great crime against nature.

By tapping into magic, we tap into nature's own power of defending herself, her corrective for "civilization." We give avenues of expression to a natural force for correction and balance that otherwise would never even be acknowledged. We are in league

with the memories of the forest and our own forgotten faery selves, now banished to the underworld. Let us invoke our friends, the banished and forbidden spirits of nature and self, as well as the ghosts of Indian, wise-woman, faggot, Black sorcerer, and witch. They will hear our deepest call and come. Through us the spirits will speak again.

# LARRY MITCHELL

*Larry Mitchell was a poet, novelist, playwright, and sociologist whose works include My Life as a Mole and The Terminal Bar. His book The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions provides a prophetic and erotic history of LGBTQ movements for liberation.*

## From *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions*

The faggots cultivate the most obscure and outrageous parts of the past. They cultivate those past events which the men did not want to happen and which, once they did happen, they wanted to forget. These are the parts the faggots love the best. And they love them so much that they tell the old stories over and over and then they act them out and then, as the ultimate tribute, they allow their lives to re-create those obscure parts of the past. The pain of fallen women and the triumph of defeated women are constantly and lovingly made flesh again. The destruction of witty faggots and the militancy of beaten faggots are constantly and lovingly made flesh again. And so these parts of the past are never lost. They are imprinted in the bodies of the faggots where the men cannot go.

The men want everyone to remember and commemorate only their moments of victory and plenitude. The men hope that only they have such moments. So history becomes a chronicle of wars and brutality and state splendor. Art attempts to transform men's brutishness into men's benevolence. The faggots know better. They know that one man's victory means the defeat of others and that some men's plenitude means that others go hungry. The faggots refuse to celebrate the men's lies.

## WOMEN WISDOM

The strong women told the faggots that there are two important things to remember about the coming revolutions. The first is that we will get our asses kicked. The second is that we will win.

The faggots knew the first. Faggot ass-kicking is a time-honored sport of the men. But the faggots did not know about the second. They had never thought about winning before. They did not even know what winning meant. So they asked the strong women and the strong women said winning was like surviving, only better. As the strong women explained winning, the faggots were surprised and then excited. The faggots knew about surviving for they always had and this was going to be just plain better. That made ass-kicking different. Getting your ass kicked and then winning elevated the entire enterprise of making revolution.

## DISRUPTION: TACTICS

The faggots never tire of fucking with the men's minds. Once all the faggots let their hair grow long, wore necklaces made of silver and shells and clothes of colorful, elaborate fabrics. They looked so stunning that the men overlooked their principles and began to look stunning also. When the men all looked like faggots, the faggots cut their hair, put on black leather, and looked like the men used to look. The men were annoyed and pretended not to notice. Growing bored with basic black leather, the faggots began to elaborate. They wore black fishnet stockings and high heels with their black leather jackets. They carefully sewed imitation rhinestones all over their black leather pants. They wore feather boas as they rode their motorcycles through the devastated city. They wore flowing gold lamé gowns and work boots with their short hair and dirty fingernails. They drank beer and swore, in velvet robes and furs. They sipped champagne and talked refined in paint-splattered blue denim. The men did not want to look at any of this. And when they



had to, they became confused and petulant and unpleasant, which pleased the faggots.

## ACTION: FIERCE AGAINST THE MEN

One warm and rainy night, the faggots and their friends were gathered in one of their favorite cellars dancing and stroking each other gently.

Suddenly, the men, armed with categories in their minds and guns in their hands, appeared at the door. The faggots, true to their training for survival, scrambled out the back windows, up into the alley, and out into the anonymous night. The queens, unable to scam in their gold lamé and tired of just surviving, stayed. They waited until boldness and fear made them resourceful. Then, armed with their handbags and their high heels, they let out a collective shriek heard round the world and charged the men. The sound, one never heard before, unnerved the men long enough for the queens to get out onto the streets. And once on the streets, their turf, mayhem broke out. The word went out and from all over the devastated city, queens moved onto the streets, armed, to shout and fight. The faggots, seeing smoke, cautiously came out of hiding and joyously could hardly believe what they saw. Elegant, fiery, exuberant queens were tearing up the street, building barricades, delivering insults, daring the men.

So they joined the queens and for three days and three nights the queens and their friends told the men, in every way they knew how, to fuck off.

## CHIRLANE MCCRAY

*First Lady of New York City, Chirlane McCray is also a writer, editor, and advocate. At the time of writing "I Am a Lesbian" for Essence magazine in 1979, she was involved in Salsa Soul Sisters, one of the first organizations for lesbians of color. This groundbreaking piece speaks to the tremendous expansion of possibilities for self-expression and personal freedom over the course of the 1960s and '70s.*

### "I Am a Lesbian"

Telling my story has not been easy for me. I've had to dredge up memories I would rather have forgotten. The lonely, anxiety-ridden months I avoided others, attempting to hide from interrogations about my social life. The questions I couldn't or refused to answer . . . the inescapable nightmares of being rejected by family and friends. The mornings when tension-racked and covered with hives, my body would be raw from my incessant scratching. Through all this I pretended that being known as a lesbian did not bother me, that it was only a problem for other people. Yet, for me and for many women like me, being a lesbian today means living in fear of discovery and in fear of not being liked. And nothing has brought me greater misery or stagnation than those fears. Somehow I survived the tears, the isolation, and the feeling that something was terribly wrong with me for loving another woman.

Coming to terms with my life as a lesbian has been easier for me than it has been for many. Since I don't look or dress like the stereotypical bulldagger, I have a choice as to whether my sexual preference is known. Not having a recognizable difference has given me the opportunity to find out what my way of living entails on my own time. I have also been fortunate because I discovered my

preference for women early, before getting locked into a traditional marriage and having children.

When I decided to write this article, I said, “I’m writing this for my gay sisters.” I wanted my voice to reassure those who feel as isolated and alone as I once did, those who desperately seek answers to all the whys when none exist, those who are embroiled in a struggle to be themselves in a society that frowns on differences. As I wrote and relived the pain, I realized that the fears, which I had assumed to be gone, were still within me. Furthermore, I saw that I had been denying my sufferings, denying feelings that were important to me. In anger and relief, I saw the importance of being myself and knew I had to sign my real name. Coming out this far has taken me seven years and I still don’t rest easy. I worry that no employer will hire me again, that my freelance writing assignments will dwindle, that my gay friends who are still in the closet will disassociate themselves from me. I fear, in sum, that the monster of conformity will rear its angry head and devour me. But I’m weary of playing games and of hiding and being afraid. I refuse to be trapped in a half-life of worry and anxiety, wondering how to explain to others that my lover is a woman. For myself, my gay sisters, and those who care to take a step toward understanding—here is my story.



It was November and I was seventeen. On a cold afternoon I, along with several hundred other women, was attending a freshman orientation at our Seven Sister college. Before long, everyone grew restless. There seemed to be no end to the traditions, rules, and regulations we were supposed to absorb. A woman, who I later found out was named Sharon, sat beside me. With her straightened hair and prim collar, she looked conservative—a typical Ivy Leaguer—and I groaned inwardly. But she made me grin when suddenly, unexpectedly, she leaned over and whispered, “Don’t you wish we had a joint?”

“Tomorrow.” I winked, striking my most genteel pose. “Before tea.”

From that moment on, we were inseparable. Although Sharon was reserved and I was the take-charge type, we were both pretty much loners. We also had similar interests. Like me, Sharon loved jazz and sunsets and had read Lucille Clifton and James Alan McPherson. She too hated parties and socials and only paid lip service to the frantic manhunt that preoccupied many of our classmates. Together, Sharon and I could find peace. While our roommates party-hopped every weekend, we kept one another company—swimming, studying, and writing poetry—content just to be with each other.

One morning, four months later, we found ourselves in one another’s arms, admitting for the first time our love for each other. I was ecstatic. There was the joy of waking to her whispers and the soft warmth of her woman’s touch. Beyond that was the joy of discovery, of watching a new part of me unfolding. It was like a second birth. Yet, however natural our loving seemed, we were both aware that this was a turning point in both our lives.

“Have you ever made love with a woman before?” I asked shyly. “Did you just do it because you were drunk?”

“No,” she protested. “I wanted to.”

“Well,” I persisted, “how did you know what to do?”

At that, we burst into nervous giggles, clinging closer together. What was happening between us? What was this euphoria? Although both of us had slept with men, neither of us had been intimate with a woman before. We didn’t even *know* any lesbians. How and why had this happened? As we lay together, we mulled over the thousand questions we suddenly had to ask each other.

I wanted to tell someone. “I’m in love!” I was so very happy. Everything was Sharon. Sometimes we wondered if anyone could tell we were more than just friends. But we were so wrapped up in each other that no one else mattered.

We convinced our roommates to switch, and Sharon moved in with me. No one seemed suspicious, since the arrangement seemed perfectly logical. Our roommates had the same schedules, majors,

and interests, and Sharon and I were clearly compatible. We knew enough to keep the true nature of our relationship secret, even though neither of us realized how much we were getting into. Having always been loved, accepted, and praised, we were unaware of the scorn and ridicule that society might heap upon us for being “different.”

Sharon and I realized that we had always been more attracted to women, both emotionally and physically, than to men. We were very sure that we loved women and preferred them as lovers. Our doubts concerned the kind of life this meant for us. What if people found out—would we still be liked? What if we wanted to have children? Could we, should we, ever tell our parents? Would they disown us? Could we get expelled from college? Did any of this matter? Having no experience or information was frightening.

We soon learned that it is one thing to prepare for problems and quite another to meet them head-on. Despite all our questioning, Sharon and I had managed to create a small, private haven together. That peace came to a sudden end one night when we forgot to lock the door to our room. We were quite popular and friends and acquaintances were accustomed to making unannounced visits for late-night conversation and tea. Sharon and I were sitting on the same bed hugging one another when the door opened. Light flooded the room, we sprang apart. “Shit!” I whispered.

“Sorry,” muttered a tall, dark figure, backing quickly out the door. After speedy deliberation, Sharon ran out to explain what we were *really* doing. Feeling paranoid, I waited and waited for her return. When she came back, she rehashed her lie for me and assured me that our friend had bought the story. But I did not feel reassured.

Suddenly, I felt trapped. Sharon was content with loving me in isolation, but my forthright Sagittarian spirit rebelled against the lies, the secrecy, and the threat of discovery. I knew I was not free.

Although I don’t consider my sexual preference the most important aspect of my existence, I wanted people I cared about to know this love that brought me so much happiness. Sharon and I agreed to tell a few friends. Telling people was not as hard as I thought, and had Sharon and I known more liberal groups of sisters,

we might never have felt any negative repercussions. Ironically, the two women we spent the most time with were the most unreasonable about homosexuality. One of them would grow wild at the mere mention of a rumored lesbian relationship between two professors. Yet, she loved to talk about them. Although I never told her we were gay, I sensed, as she grew more and more distant toward us, that she knew. Well respected and sociable, her changed behavior affected others and I was sure that the word was out.

I had been elected dormitory representative for our class, but I withdrew from what had been exuberant participation. Maybe I imagined those funny, tense silences during a chance encounter or while riding in the elevator with what had been our loud, laughing crowd of friends. Maybe no one stopped speaking to us and it was my own sudden quiet that precipitated the change. But I don't believe that to be true. Tension settled over my life and I slowly knitted a cocoon around my feelings to protect me from a hurt and confusion I did not understand. I was frustrated by the hiding, the lies, and guilt, but there was no outlet. I didn't know how to react to the ignorance and fear that constitute the prejudice many heterosexuals have against gays. I didn't know how to quiet my fear of rejection. It was getting harder and harder to get up in the morning, let alone study, and Sharon and I began to argue and find excuses to stay away from each other.

We finally decided to consult a psychiatrist because there was no one else whom we could trust and who could be objective. We also figured that we could not possibly be the first and only women at this school who have had problems like this. Although the American Psychiatric Association had not yet declared homosexuality a viable alternative lifestyle, the psychiatrist assured us that our difficulties stemmed from our living conditions rather than from a confusion about our sexual orientation. Sharon was about security while I was about risking and exploring—discovering what kind of life I could have in the real world. Separating was a long and painful process, and Sharon saw the psychiatrist for some time after.

I moved alone to a new dormitory and eased into my new life. I grew more serious about writing and changed my major from

psychology to English. I also explored lesbianism through books, as an attempt toward self-definition.

In *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman*, authors Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love define a lesbian as “. . . a woman whose primary psychological, emotional, erotic and social interest is in members of her own sex even though that interest may not be expressed. Lesbianism is a state of mind rather than a sexual act.” Just as a woman may be heterosexual yet never marry or even have significant relationships with men, so can a woman be gay, yet never have a lesbian relationship. Sharon and I had always thought of ourselves as heterosexual largely because society had conditioned us to believe that was what we should be. We had had positive relationships with men, but the depth, understanding, and warmth we felt for each other was beyond comparison.

My new rooming situation allowed me to make more friends. I began to meet women and men who were from cities and had been exposed to people with varied lifestyles. They were secure enough not to be threatened by my lesbianism. A couple of sisters even admitted that they had questioned their heterosexuality. Although neither of them had ever slept with a woman, they realized that lesbianism goes beyond the bedroom. One sister felt that, while she would always have a greater love and respect for women, she could never disappoint her family, who expected her to marry and have children. The other sister, who intended to have a political career, didn't feel that could ever be a reality if she were to have relationships with women. We had many long discussions about whether it was possible or even practical to sacrifice a loving relationship with a woman for family or the outside world. Although I didn't feel it was necessary to make either of those sacrifices. I realized that it takes a certain courage and strength to be visible.

It was not long before my own strength was tested. I was just getting used to the idea of living as a gay woman when I went home for spring break. I had been home less than a day when my parents called me into the family room for a private conference. “Is this yours?” my mother asked, handing me a brochure for an upcoming lesbian conference. My skin went cold, my fingers twitched

nervously, and my heart fluttered. Somehow I managed to answer “yes,” and to admit my involvement in lesbian activities. My father was stunned. He said he knew that men in prison were often into homosexuality, but he didn’t know about this. It was my turn to be stunned. I honestly didn’t realize how little he knew about homosexuality.

“Would you rather have gone to a coed college?” my mother questioned. Preoccupied with wanting to know what they had done wrong, she seemed to feel responsible.

“No.” I replied, surprised that she had even asked. It had been my decision to attend a women’s college. I had been accepted at four coed colleges, but I had consciously chosen an all-female school. I loved women. Even if Sharon was the last female lover I would ever have, I’d still prefer women. I didn’t know why any more than anyone else did. I rambled on nervously about some study I had read, which stated that there were more gay people on coed campuses because students at single-sex schools were overly paranoid about homosexuality. My parents stared at me with blank expressions. I could have been speaking Swahili for all they knew.

Finally my father sighed. “You’re Black and you’re a woman,” he declared. “I don’t see why you want to be involved in something like this.”

“You talk as if I had a choice,” I protested, my reaction coming from the gut.

My father was taken aback for a moment. It was slowly dawning on him that I was dead serious. “Well,” he said, shaking his head, “I don’t condemn it, but I don’t condone it either.” My mother was silent.

Despite all my fears, I felt relieved. At last, it seemed I was free. Now that my parents knew about me and were still willing to acknowledge me as their daughter, it didn’t seem to matter whether others accepted me or not. I did not know then that the conversation was just the beginning of a long road toward acceptance.

When I returned to school, I blossomed. Coming from Smalltown, USA, from my hardworking, insular family, I hadn’t really



experienced city life. Every gay event, organization, and place seemed to be in the city and I had hopes of finding other gay Black women there.

One night a friend and I decided to hitchhike into town and find Sappho's Retreat, an all-women's bar. After a 40-minute journey, we finally located it in the dark and isolated heart of what is the business district during the day. A yellow sign hanging over the entrance was like a beacon, and a dozen curious faces turned toward us as we entered.

Trying hard not to stare, we made our way to the dance floor and were greeted by the truly pleasurable sight of women dancing together. The cozy atmosphere was in sharp contrast to the dark, dank images I had conjured up.

I saw several Black women at tables, talking and drinking. One sister with a short-cropped Afro who was standing alone glanced over at me. I was dying to talk to her and she came over as if she knew what I was thinking.

"You look like a friend of mine," she began, launching into a whole monologue about how she hated going to bars, but that there were so few other places to go. Her name was Leona.

I interrupted her to explain that I had come to this bar because I knew very few gay sisters and I wanted to meet more. Leona's face brightened, then dimmed. "Well, there are a lot of us, you know there just have to be. We have a kind of underground network because this bar and the women's center are all for white women. I'll keep you informed about parties, meetings, whatever I hear."

Leona and I became good friends over the next five years. Through her I discovered an entirely unheard-of, unseen community of gay Black women, few of whom had ever set foot in a gay bar.

Leona and I were still talking when someone came up behind me, grasped my hand gently, and asked me to dance.

I turned around and gazed into the honey-brown face of a woman with mischief in her eyes. She was a couple of inches taller than me and was smiling so warmly I couldn't take my eyes away from her as we "bumped" onto the dance floor.

When the song was over, we sat down to talk and I discovered that her name was Sharla. She was a transfer student from California, who was attending a university close by. Sharla and I became friends, and two months later we were relating intimately. Although we liked being together, we continued to date other women occasionally because we were both leery of being tied down. During our two years together, we learned a great deal from each other.

What was amazing was that Sharla had been openly gay since she was 14 years old. Her parents had allowed her to entertain homosexual friends at home and participate in gay events and activities. She told me her parents tolerated her homosexuality because they thought it was merely a stage she was going through. They had only insisted that she attend a coed university.

Both of us had boyfriends in high school, but we had always ended the relationships. Sharla had bent to her parents' subtle pressure to at least "try it." I had reacted from sheer loneliness and peer pressure. Unlike Sharla, I had had a sexual experience with a man, which I found both physically and emotionally satisfying. But I could not admit that I had always been more attracted to women than to men. The longing had been there even though it was unarticulated at that time.

Sharla and I sat on panels and conducted workshops on the dilemma of being a minority and gay. Through these activities we met and exchanged ideas with gays outside of the bars and, as a result, established close friendships and were frequently invited to dinners and house parties.

I also stayed in touch with Leona and eventually joined a Black feminists group to which she belonged. I had not embraced the feminist movement up until then because I thought it was a white woman's cause. I did not connect the economic oppression and physical and psychological abuse of Black women with women's rights until I attended the group's consciousness-raising sessions. Talking with other sisters about what was happening to us and discussing our own experiences made me realize that Black women must struggle even harder than white women for equal rights. I

decided that we have a responsibility to preempt some of the movement's goals and use it to meet our needs. And further, we have to let Black men know that the movement is not a denial of men, but an affirmation of women, whether we are straight or gay, married or single, homemakers or professionals.

My interest in the women's movement led me to start a Black feminist publication at college in the spring of my junior year. Despite this, numerous other extracurricular activities, and a heavy course load, I was doing well in all of my classes. I was writing poetry and short stories and had more energy than ever before. An essay I wrote earned me a scholarship that would enable me to travel through Africa for six weeks that summer. Sharla would be in Hawaii that same summer, so we spent every possible moment we could together.

By senior year, separate interests and goals were beginning to draw Sharla and I apart. After graduation, Sharla went abroad and I attended a summer publishing course, took a few odd jobs, and then moved to New York City to embark upon my career. I also had begun to realize that I did not want to spend my life drifting in and out of relationships. I hoped instead to find someone with whom to live, dream and build a life.

New York City's gay scene was overwhelming! I was delighted when I found SalsaSoul, a third world organization for gay feminists. Walking into a roomful of sisters who were relating with each other positively teaching, learning, sharing was a heady experience. Through SalsaSoul I discovered Jemima, a Black lesbian writers collective. The first time I heard the strong, spirited voices of my sister artists, I knew that despite New York's fast pace, crowds, dirt and crime, I had found my place.

Sometime later, a Jemima member invited me to a birthday party. I did not meet Candice, the hostess, until about three in the morning. I wished her happy birthday, and we rapped for a short while. Before I left, Candice gave me her number and urged me to call.

That Monday I called Candice and we made a dinner date. "This must be destiny," she told me, after discovering that we worked only

four blocks away from each other. After that first dinner she made dates with me for every lunch and dinner that week. It seemed we had to be together every moment. I had wanted a serious, stable relationship with a woman, but I hadn't expected it to happen so quickly. I lost track of my meals and grew absentminded. Talking throughout most of the night, neither of us got much sleep. Before long we were truly, dizzily in love.

Our friends looked upon the match dubiously. Candice was 34 and I was 22. She was a streetwise native New Yorker and I was naive. She loved cats and I was allergic to them. Yet, we both reveled in the comforts of home, enjoyed travel and poetry, and seemed to have similar goals and desires for the future.

Candice and I have now been together for two and a half years. That time has been wonderful for both of us, although it has not been all sweetness and flowers. Like other couples, we have been through our stormy periods. But these times have brought us closer together.

Today one of my major concerns is the attitude of my parents toward our relationship. What my mother and father may have viewed as youthful experimentation seven years ago, they must now acknowledge as my life. They also have to acknowledge Candice as the woman with whom I am living and with whom I hope to spend my life.

Last Christmas Candice and I stayed with my parents. My brother also brought home the woman he is living with. My mother was warm toward Candice, and my father was polite though reserved a bit.

Later he voiced his refusal to deal with any kind of "living together" arrangements while my brother and I were under his roof. We were welcome home anytime, but we were not to bring anyone with us unless we were married. I felt a rejection of greater dimensions than what my brother must have felt. Unlike him, I will never marry; society chooses to sanction only certain kinds of loving.

Although I love and respect my father, I can't live the life he wants me to, nor will I seek his approval. His attitude is not just

conservative or old-fashioned, but closed. My mother and Candice liked each other instantly, which pleased and reassured me. Since the holidays my mother and I have grown closer, keeping in touch by writing, phoning, and exchanging reading material. She always asks about Candice, and I'm hoping she'll be able to visit us in New York soon.

I haven't given up on bringing my father around, since I have seen him changing his attitudes toward others who haven't met his standards previously. But I am still torn between wanting to spend time with my mother and not wanting to see him. And of course, I don't want Candice to be uncomfortable. When I call home, though, my father seems glad to hear from me. I am sure that he is proud of me in his own way.

At 24 I have worked in the editorial department of a national magazine. I'm a published writer and I have many honors and awards to my credit. I am optimistic about my relationship with both my parents. I may not have turned out *exactly* as they dreamed, but I do have what they seemed to want most for their children—love and happiness.

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—, "Where Were You During the Christopher St. Riots?" Mattachine Society, Inc. of New York Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

—, "If You Are Arrested." Mattachine Society, Inc. of New York Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library



## Appendix

MATTACHINE SOCIETY, INC. OF NEW YORK. "PENALTIES FOR SEX OFFENSES IN THE UNITED STATES—1964."

Mattachine Society, Inc. of New York Records  
Manuscripts and Archives Division  
The New York Public Library

This flyer outlining the legal penalties for sodomy in the United States in 1964 clearly illustrates that homosexuality was illegal in every U.S. state except Illinois. The penalties ranged from a \$500 fine in Wisconsin (which was a considerable amount of money in 1964) to possible life in prison (Nevada). It is noteworthy that Mattachine activists also charted legal penalties for fornication and cohabitation. Given the current greater acceptance of premarital sex and unmarried couples living together, it is frightening to think of the possible legal consequences of this now normal behavior in the 1960s. Mattachine activists included fornication and cohabitation in their analysis in order to make a broader argument about the importance of sexual freedom and the need to reduce the government's interference in people's intimate lives. This flyer was probably distributed at East Coast Homophile Organization conferences in the 1960s. The societal oppression it illustrates was fuel for the Stonewall uprising.

## PENALTIES FOR SEX OFFENSES IN THE UNITED STATES - 1964

MAXIMUM FINE and/or IMPRISONMENT for FIRST OFFENSE unless otherwise noted, as of 1964.  
When TWO NUMBERS ARE GIVEN, THEY REPRESENT MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM PENALTIES.

STATE	SODOMY*	FORNICATION	ADULTERY	COHABITATION
ALABAMA	2-10 yrs.	\$100 to ? or 6 mos.**	\$100 to ? or 6 mos.**	
ALASKA	1-10 yrs.	\$500 or 2 years or both	\$200 or 3 mos.	
ARIZONA	5-20 yrs.		3 yrs.	3 yrs.
ARKANSAS	1-21 yrs.			\$20-\$100***
CALIFORNIA	1 yr. to ?			\$1000 or 1 yr. or both
COLORADO	1-14 years	\$200 or 6 mos.****	\$200 or 6 mos.****	
CONNECTICUT	30 years	\$100 or 6 mos. or both	5 yrs.	
DELAWARE	\$1000 and 3 yrs.	\$300 or 6 mos.	\$500, 1 yr. or both	
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	\$1000 or 10 yrs.	\$300 or 6 mos. or both	\$500 or 1 yr. or both	
FLORIDA	20 yrs.	\$30 or 3 mos.	\$500 or 2 yrs.	\$300 or 2 yrs.
GEORGIA	1-10 yrs. 2nd con-viction, 10-30 yrs	\$1000 or 12 mos. or both	\$1000 or 12 mos. or both	
HAWAII	\$1000 and 20 yrs.	\$15-\$50 or 1-3 months	\$30-\$100 or 3-12 mos. or both*****	
IDAHO	5 yrs to ?	\$300 or 6 mos. or both	\$100-\$1000 or 3 mos.-3 yrs.	\$300 or 6 mos. or both
ILLINOIS		\$200 or 6 mos. or both	\$500 or 1 yr. or both	
INDIANA	\$100-\$1000 or 2-14 yrs. or both	\$500 or 6 mos. or both	\$500 or 6 mos. or both	
IOWA	10 yrs.		\$300 and 1 yr. or 1-3 yrs.	
KANSAS	10 yrs.	\$500 or 6 mos. or both	\$500 or 6 mos. or both	
KENTUCKY	2-5 yrs.	\$20-\$50	\$20-\$50	
LOUISIANA	\$2000 or 5 yrs. or both			\$1000 or 1 yr. or both
MAINE	1-10 yrs.	\$100 and 2 mos.	\$1000 or 5 yrs.	\$300 or 5 yrs.
MARYLAND	1-10 yrs.		\$10	
MASSACHUSETTS	20 yrs.	\$30 or 3 mos.	\$500 or 3 yrs.	\$300 or 3 yrs.
MICHIGAN	15 yrs.	\$500 or 1 yr.	\$2000 or 4 yrs. or both	
MINNESOTA	20 yrs.	\$100 or 3 mos.	\$300 or 2 yrs.	
MISSISSIPPI	10 yrs.	\$500 and 6 mos.	\$500 and 6 mos.	
MISSOURI	2 yrs to ?	\$1000 or 1 yr. or both	\$1000 or 1 yr. or both	





STATE	SODOMY*	FORNICATION	ADULTERY	COHABITATION
MONTANA	5 yrs to ?	\$500 or 6 mos. or both	\$500 or 6 mos. or both	
NEBRASKA	20 yrs.	\$100 and 6 mos.	1 yr.	
NEVADA	1 yr.-life	\$500-\$1000 or 6 mos.1 yr.or both	\$500-\$1000 or 6 mos.1 yr.or both	
NEW HAMP.	\$1000 or 5 yrs. or both	\$50 or 6 mos.	\$500 & 1 yr. or 2-3 yrs.	
NEW JERSEY	\$5000 or 20 yrs. or both	\$50 or 6 mos. or both	\$1000 or 3 yrs. or both	
NEW MEXICO	\$5000 or 2-10 yrs or both			\$100 or 6 mos. or both
NEW YORK	3 mos.		\$250, 6 mos. or both	
NO. CAROLINA	5-60 years	Fine or jail or both as court directs.	Fine, jail or both as court directs.	
NO. DAKOTA	10 yrs.	\$100 or 1 mo. or both	\$500 or 3 yrs. or both	\$100-\$500 or 1-3 months.
OHIO	1-20 yrs.	\$200 or 3 mos.	\$200 or 3 mos.	
OKLAHOMA	10 yrs.		\$500, 5 yrs. or both	
OREGON	15 yrs.	\$50-\$300 or 1-6 mos.	\$200-\$1000 or 3 mos.-2 yrs.	
PENNSYLVANIA	\$5000 or 10 yrs. or both	\$100	\$500 or 1 yr.	
RHODE ISLAND	7-20 yrs.	\$10	\$500 or 1 yr.	
S. CAROLINA	\$5000 to ? or 5 yrs. or both	\$100-\$500 or 6 mos.-1 yr. or both	\$100-\$500 or 6 mos.-1 yr. or both	
S. DAKOTA	10 yrs.		\$500, 5 yrs. or both	
TENNESSEE	5-15 yrs.			
TEXAS	2-15 yrs.	\$50-\$500	\$100-\$1000	
UTAH	3-20 yrs.	\$100 or 6 mos.	4 yrs.	5 yrs.
VERMONT	1-5 yrs.		\$1000, 5 yrs. or both	
VIRGINIA	1-3 yrs.	\$20-\$100	\$20-\$100	\$50-\$500
WASHINGTON	10 yrs.		\$1000 or 2 yrs.	\$1M, 1 yr. or both
W. VIRGINIA	1-10 yrs.	\$20 to ?	\$20 to ?	\$50 to ? or 6 mos. or both
WISCONSIN	\$500 or 5 yrs. or both	\$200 or 6 mos. or both	\$1000 or 3 yrs. or both	\$500 or 1 yr. or both
WYOMING	10 yrs.	\$100 and 3 mos.	\$100 and 3 mos.	

\* Sodomy, often referred to as "the crime against nature," includes a wide variety of "unnatural" sexual activity, with animals or with another person of either sex, both within and outside of marriage.

\*\* \$300 to ? or 1 yr. for 2nd conviction; 2 years for third conviction.

\*\*\* \$100 to ? or 1 year for 2nd conviction; 1-3 years for third conviction.

\*\*\*\* Double 1st sentence imposed for 2nd conviction, double 2nd for 3rd conv., and so on.

\*\*\*\*\* Penalty for male only; for female, penalty is less: \$10 to \$30 or 1-3 yrs.

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MATTACHINE SOCIETY INC., OF NEW YORK, 1133 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, NEW YORK, 10010 (JT67)



MATTACHINE SOCIETY, INC. OF NEW YORK. "WHERE WERE YOU DURING THE  
CHRISTOPHER ST. RIOTS?"

Mattachine Society, Inc. of New York Records  
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This flyer was distributed by the Mattachine Society after the Stonewall uprising in order to inspire and recruit new, younger activists. The flyer invokes issues of long concern to Mattachine activists, including harassment by the police, the unfairness of the State Liquor Authority, and the oppression of homosexuals, but with a new sense of urgency. In the wake of the riots of the Stonewall uprising, a new generation was drawn to the activism of homophile organizations like the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis. These young activists quickly transcended these organizations, creating new movements like the Gay Liberation Front, Gay Activists Alliance, Radicalesbians, and Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR).



WHERE WERE YOU  
DURING THE

CHRISTOPHER ST. RIOTS?

On the evenings of June 27th and 28th, hundreds of homosexuals violently protested the attempted closing of another gay bar in Greenwich Village. The police raided the well-known bar near Sheridan Square on the charge that liquor was being served without a license. This is a legitimate reason but WHY WAS THIS BAR ALLOWED TO OPERATE FOR YEARS WITH HARDLY ANY POLICE INTERFERENCE? WHY DID THE POLICE PICK THIS TIME TO CRACKDOWN ON ILLEGAL OPERATIONS? These and many other questions deserve answering.

IF YOU ARE TIRED OF -

- \* Police officials who have decided to harass homosexuals again
- \* Syndicate leaders who exploit homosexuals
- \* A State Liquor Authority which will not grant licenses for legitimate gay bars
- \* Mayoral candidates who use "Law and Order" issues to persecute minorities, including the homosexual minority
- \* Private citizens who form vigilante groups to rout homosexuals from their community, as has happened in Queens County
- \* A Governor who has failed to legalize consensual homosexual acts between adults in private due to his political cowardice

JOIN AND ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN MATTACHINE . . . NOW IS THE TIME FOR ALL  
HOMOSEXUALS TO UNITE IN COMMON ACTION!

MATTACHINE

243 West End Avenue

ATTN: 0916





MATTACHINE SOCIETY, INC. OF NEW YORK. "IF YOU ARE ARRESTED."

Mattachine Society, Inc. of New York Records  
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One of the Mattachine Society's major initiatives in the 1960s was to inform and protect LGBTQ people from arrest. They distributed "pocket lawyer" guides to help inform people of their rights and what to do if they were arrested or questioned by authorities. After the Stonewall uprising, with the massive increase in direct action and demonstrations by LGBTQ people, these guidelines took on even greater importance. They are an important forerunner of later legal guides to civil disobedience by direct action groups like ACT UP.

# IF YOU ARE ARRESTED

In the past, many homosexuals have suffered unnecessarily because they were unfamiliar with their rights under law when they were placed under arrest. Follow and learn the steps outlined below to protect yourself in case of arrest.

1. New York State law requires any person to identify himself at a policeman's request.
2. It is always wise to demand that an arresting officer specify the charge against you. Even if he does not, you must be told the charge when you are arraigned.
3. You must be informed of your rights under law by the arresting officer.
4. You have the right to make a telephone call to any person AS SOON AS YOU ENTER THE POLICE STATION. This is a right, not a privilege. Although the police may be reluctant to allow you to make a call, INSIST UPON IT!
5. (a) You are required, if the police request it, to allow your fingerprints and photograph to be taken.  
(b) You are NOT required to give ANY information, except your name and address. DO NOT GIVE ANY OTHER INFORMATION, such as your place of employment, your employer's name, the circumstances of your arrest or the events leading up to the arrest, your personal life, your ideas about homosexuality, etc. REMEMBER! MAKE NO STATEMENTS AND SIGN NO STATEMENTS NO MATTER HOW INSISTENT THE POLICE MAY BE!
6. Plead NOT GUILTY and follow through. A plea of GUILTY may seem much more convenient, but this is wrong. A plea of NOT GUILTY will not result in harsher treatment while a plea of GUILTY will result in a permanent police record which may be checked by present and future employers.
7. Get a lawyer at the earliest possible time; be truthful with him; follow his advice implicitly. Avoid lawyers recommended by the police. If you don't know how to get a lawyer, call MATTACHINE.
8. Behave with dignity and insist that the police treat you with respect. If you are insulted or mistreated, object at the time, object later by letter to the Chief of Police, inform the Mattachine.

## MATTACHINE





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