

It Started at Stonewall

Judith E. Beckett

I've just gotten back from New York City and a steering committee meeting for Stonewall/25. While I was there, I grabbed a cab for Carnegie Hall and arrived just in time for the second half of the New York City Gay Men's Chorus concert with Holly Near and the Flirtations.

Near was on stage talking up Stonewall/25. She reminded us that the Stonewall Rebellion we will be commemorating in New York City this year began on the same day as Judy Garland's funeral, June 27, 1969. Long lines of mourners had waited in the sweltering heat of New York City all that day to pay their last respects to the star. Emotions were high and the moon was full that night. Perhaps because of Garland's funeral, there were more people than usual in Sheridan Square and in the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street. In any event, when the six officers from NYC's Tactical Police Force arrived for a "routine" raid on the unlicensed bar, they didn't expect any resistance. They imposed the usual fines on the management, harrassed and humiliated as many of the mainly African-American and Latino working-class patrons as they could before they slipped out the exits, and arrested a few drag queens and kings*. One by one they led the patrons out of the bar to the paddy wagon. Drag queens struck extravagant poses and blew kisses to the crowd. Then suddenly, a figure appeared in the doorway struggling with the two cops restraining her. The crowd erupted into violent protest. Rocks were thrown. The police retreated back into the bar to wait for reinforcements. Someone tore a parking meter out of the cement and barricaded the door with it. Then they tried to set the bar on fire with the police inside. A fire was started in the street as more and more people arrived to join the insurrection.

The Stonewall Rebellion lasted for three days. A few days later, the nation's first Gay Power rally was organized in Washington Square, followed by a candlelight march to the Stonewall Inn. Five hundred people chanted "Gay Power!" for the first time in history. That was the beginning of the Gay Liberation

Movement. At Carnegie Hall, Holly Near looked out over the packed audience of lesbians and gay men and their supporters and imagined with us what New York City will be like this summer when hundreds of thousands of gays and lesbians arrive in the city to celebrate this history and join The International March on the United Nations to Affirm the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Drag and Transgender People.

Then she sang Somewhere Over the Rainbow. For us. About our rainbow, the symbol of the great diversity and inclusiveness of our community. About the March on the United Nations which will demand a place in the world for all of us. "Somewhere there's a place for us..."

I'm hoping you'll join us in New York in June for the March, Candlelight Event and Rally in Central Park. The Tri-State Alliance (Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire) is working on establishing "a (safe) place for us" in the city (a Hospitality Space where we can meet, get information, leave messages and rest). We are reserving an AMTRAK car for Vermonters and hope to get a bus or two going also. Maps of the city and the transportation system will be available. Volunteers will meet buses and trains coming into the city to make sure everyone gets to the March and rally safely. Some members of our own Vermont Pride Committee will be marshalls at the March. In fact, experienced Pride Committee members from all over the country will be handling that assignment. Please keep an eye out for our logo announcing Stonewall/25 sponsored events. And if you'd like to go to New York or want to help with the planning and fund-raising, please call me at (802)439-6453.

*Drag King: a woman who dresses as and may pass as a man. Read Leslie Feinberg's book *Stone Butch Blues* (Firebrand Books) to learn about the rapes, emotional assaults and physical brutality inflicted on lesbians and gays by police in similar "routine" raids on gay bars in Buffalo, New York in the 60's and 70's. ▼

Human Rights Commission

In February, the State Human Rights Commission heard two cases alleging discrimination based on sexual orientation. One of the cases has been held for further investigation.

The charging party alleged that an owner of a bed and breakfast denied him a room because of his sexual orientation. The owner has denied the charge, saying that she refused to rent the room because she believed that there were no vacancies.

The commission found (3-4) reason to believe that there were reasonable grounds to think discrimination had occurred and requested further investigation of the matter. ▼

Outright VT's
Social Support Group Meeting
 7—9 Friday Evenings
 Outright Office in Burlington.
 Call 865-9677 for information

reative Design,
 Training and
 Support Services
for the Mac and PC



187 ST PAUL ST

BURLINGTON — 802-863-1884