



IT'S TIME, ILLINOIS...

...FOR FREEDOM OF
GENDER EXPRESSION!

Political Action for the Transgender Community

Volume 8 Issue 3

March 2002

Sylvia Rivera, leader of Stonewall rebellion, passes away

Legend has it that a young trans-woman removed her shoes and threw them at a police officer who was raiding The Stonewall, a New York queer bar, thus beginning the Stonewall Riots. Whether the story is true or not (she neither confirmed nor denied it), Sylvia Rivera was a transsexual firebrand who demonstrated, protested, lobbied, and otherwise fought for human rights.

This morning (February 19, 2002) at 5:30 am, Sylvia Rivera died of complications arising from liver cancer. Her lover, Julia Murray, and her close friend and pastor, Reverend Pat Baumgardner of Metropolitan Community Church (NYC) were with her at the end. She leaves behind many of us who deeply loved and respected her for her insights, her fire, and her passion for helping the transie street girls.

She, along with Marsha P. Johnson and several other *street transvestites*, formed Street Transvestite (now Transgender) Action Revolutionarie (STAR) in the wake of Stonewall. STAR members were the core of the Gay Liberation Front people who founded the first New York Lesbian and Gay Community Center. Sylvia fought her whole life to make sure gender variant people were included in any agenda put forward in the name of the Gay and Lesbian community. She and Marsha ran STAR Houses, where young trans hookers could find safe shelter and food, and perhaps a way off of the streets. And when she too was homeless, living on the NYC piers, she even maintained a STAR House out of cardboard

(Continued on Page 4)

WHATEVER

By Beth Plotner

Tip of the Iceberg

Within the next month or so, It's Time, Illinois, will be issuing our 2000-2001 report on discrimination and hate crimes. Many of you have read our previous reports. If you haven't read any of our past reports I urge you to do so. The reports are available on our web site.

One of the main uses for our reports is for education. Education of our elected officials, education of our other public officials, education for the educators and of course education for the LGTB community.

(Continued on Page 3)

**The Next Meeting of
It's Time, Illinois
Will Take Place at 7:30 p.m. on
Thursday, March 7
at TransGenesis
4554 N Broadway, Suite 311
in Chicago**

It's All About Me... NOT!

By Lisa Scheps

I am having real trouble writing this month's column. Oh, my computer works fine, I have the time, I have the inclination, but I don't have the voice. I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that the one thing that Lisa HAS is a voice... sometimes (most times) too much of a voice.

But it's true. I've lost my voice, my ability to put words down on paper. I'm experiencing 'writer's block.' I'm at a loss. I don't know what to....

Now wait just a gawd darn minute there. I just figured it out, I do know what to do. I'll write about having a voice. YIPPEE! I'm no longer blocked. I can do it!

I sat and thought about why I couldn't bring myself to write my article, the reason became clear in pretty short order. I was (am) afraid. Fear – what a debilitating emotion. What do I have to be afraid of? I'm afraid that people won't think that anything I say that is worthwhile. I am afraid that my voice is not 'loud' enough to be heard.

BUNK!

My voice IS loud enough to be heard. And it **should** be heard. All of our voices should be heard. And I believe that they are... more than we think. We are heard in many, any different venues. Not just in the political arena, although that is very important and why It's Time Illinois exists. But we are also heard in the greater society. (When I say "greater," I'm not implying that other parts of society are **better** than others, I simply mean all of society. Geez, don't be so sensitive.)

It is amazing to me how one small voice can be heard without even trying. I have heard back from people how my coming out to them has changed their lives in profoundly positive ways. For instance, my niece wrote the following essay for her college entrance application. I warn you, some material you are about to read may cause an emotional outbreak. Read with care:

One year ago my world suddenly changed when my uncle became my aunt. By this I mean my mother's brother Eric, a man I turned to for compassion, common sense, and cool was now to be my aunt Rikki in every sense of the word.

I remember the day that my parents hemmed and hawed, shuffled their feet, and tentatively said, "We have something to tell you about Uncle Ricky." I listened for the word 'cancer' or 'sick'. I was not prepared to hear "sex reassignment." He was scheduled to have a sex change to become the woman he believed he was rightfully meant to be from birth. I cannot explain the shock and anger I felt towards him. How could he do this to me?

I felt as though I was on a B-grade talk show. I didn't realize that my new Aunt Rikki was terrified about how I would take the news. I finally wrote her, expressing my feelings and offering "her" my support. This was her life, after all, and whatever made her happy, made me happy. I lied.

I found it difficult though to talk to my friends about it. How often would one of my friends tell me about a transsexual in their family? My mother gave me a book called Trans-Sister Radio, written by a family that dealt with this same challenge. It shed light on what Aunt Rikki was facing now, post-surgically and emotionally. I began to see beyond myself.

Last summer I visited Rikki at her home in Chicago, less than a year since I had been with "him" in New York. The first few days, I was nervous to be in public with her. Certainly everyone knew our secret. The more time I spent with her, I realized that people were just looking at two attractive girls walking down the street; not a transsexual and her niece. I met other transsexuals who were intelligent, interesting, and accomplished. I learned that trans-sexuality was so common, that you never really know who is walking next to you on the

street. I realized later that this was not about me at all. My selfish reaction couldn't touch the pain that Uncle Ricky had endured his whole life

Aunt Rikki has changed my perspective on love and the nature of unconditional acceptance. I now trust that Rikki knew what was best for her; her courage to become her Self staggered me, humbled me.

In college I will be faced with new and unusual situations and people. My belief system will be tested over and over again, so I must be open to new ideas and ways. It is a diverse world out there and without understanding or acceptance, where would we be? Rikki has best taught me that there is no black or white, just shades of gray. I now see the same compassion, common sense and cool in Aunt Rikki. The book is still the same; the cover has just changed. Perhaps writer Anais Nin explains Rikki's choices best, "...and then the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom."

Are you crying? I thought so. It is a beautiful essay, isn't it? All of the women in my family are excellent writers, not to mention charming, witty, sexy and beautiful.

By coming out, being heard, we have a real effect on people. We make folks look at the world in a slightly different way and I think that is a good thing. It's like when you lose your keys (it always happens when you're in a big hurry) and you can't find them anywhere. You've looked and looked and then looked some more. You know they're in the house, after all, you got in somehow. Finally you stop and approach the problem from a different direction and... Vois La... There they are! Right there on the table next to the door. If they were a snake they would have bitten you. Hopefully, you get the analogy.

But I discovered that I have become a wonderful ambassador (or is it, ambassadress) for the transgendered simply by being me. Now, I'm not suggesting that if you're in, you out yourself. Or put a sign in your car that reads, "Transsexual on Board." Or anything like that.

But I did want to try to demonstrate the power that all of our voices have. And if we use them together then they will be one helluva loud voice. And that can make a real difference.

Just like it did with my Niece. After all... It's All About Me...Not!

Whatever

(Continued from Page 1)

In the past I have heard very sobering comments from people after they have read our reports. Reactions such as "I had no idea this went on" or "I thought this stuff was illegal". Well throughout most of the state this type of discrimination is still legal. But more importantly, some are amazed at the actual number of cases we have to report. For that matter so am I. However, with me it is the low number of cases that we document. There are many more cases out there that we don't even know about. There are even some cases that we have heard about but asked not to put in our report or even mention in our newsletter. That no one but the victim and the perpetrator of the act know about. Acts of discrimination and acts of violence.

So when we issue the report and you read about the people in it just think about all the people who should be in it but aren't for whatever reason. As much of a statement the report makes with the number of cases documented think how much more of an impact the report would make if we could report most of these cases that happen within a given year. Yes, our resources are limited but what we really need are more brave souls to come forth and say, "This happened to me and I don't want it happening to anyone else". Yes that takes a lot of courage. But if more people would come in from the cold and get off the iceberg they will find the warmth and support of those who care and want to make sure it never happens again.

Sylvia Rivera

(Continued from Page 1)

boxes. Her inspiration shines as similar houses are still being formed by some of the girls she helped through the years.

She never lost the radical vision of inclusion and equality. Thanks to the transgender movement, Sylvia was finally given the respect and love for her revolutionary life. Taking up the battle for the right of gender expression, Sylvia found balance and real love for the first time. Sylvia found a partner and a community at the Metropolitan Community Church. As recently as January 2002 Sylvia was railing at the community to recognize gender variance and gender expression as a basic human right. And just last night, she met with the leadership of the Empire State Pride Agenda in her hospital room, just hours before her death, presenting the issues of concern to the community and negotiating for greater support from ESPA regarding trans-inclusion in the pending civil rights legislation here in New York State, and ESPAs opposition to same.

I consider Sylvia Rivera a close relative, a mentor and an inspiration to me personally. I am proud to have known her and to be a STAR member, carrying forward the fight for civil rights for all queer people, not just a select few.

We will miss Sylvia's presence. For so many years Sylvia was the Community's conscience. Even when she was treated with disrespect, she always remembered Marsha P. Johnson's advice. "Treat them no mind, girl. Get on with the business you are here for."

Sylvia is gone, but her legacy lives on.

Submitted by Mary Ann Horton

Lesbian Student Barred from Wearing Tie in Senior Photos

By Melanie Ave

St. Petersburg Times Staff Writer

As a child, she played with G.I. Joes and Ninja Turtles and preferred jeans and loose shirts to dresses and skirts.

By the time she was 17, she was wearing tuxedos to school dances and refusing feminine clothes.

"It's just not me," she said. So last spring, when it came time to sit for her Robinson High senior yearbook photos at Bryn-Alan Studios, Nikki and her mother decided the best attire for her would be a black suit jacket, white dress shirt and tie.

But her wardrobe choice didn't jive with the school. They were told only male students could wear shirts and ties. Female students would be photographed in a scoop-necked, black velvet drape.

To Nikki, it was "like asking a boy to go put on a dress. To my friends, it would have been the biggest joke in the world."

The flurry that followed raised questions of freedom of expression versus following the rules. Inevitably, there were lawyers. In the end, when the Robinson High Excalibur yearbook comes out this spring, Nikki's senior picture won't be in it.

Nikki, a lesbian who wears her dark brown hair cut short and a silver ring in her upper right ear, said it boils down to one thing.

"It's pure discrimination," said the teenager, who graduated from Robinson early, in December, and hopes to become a clinical psychologist.

School attorney Crosby Few had a different take: "The administration did not feel the yearbook was the place you make those kinds of statements. The next year, you might have 10 boys dressing as girls and vice versa."

That day at the studio, Nikki's mother said, the staff was pushing for her daughter to wear the drape. "She became very embarrassed," Sonia Youngblood said. "It took everything I had not to cry."

Ms. Youngblood called the assistant principal at Robinson and explained the situation. The answer was, if her daughter wanted to appear alongside her 280 classmates, she must wear the drape. "Apparently there is no provision or exception for a student who doesn't fit the mold," her mother said.

Principal Kevin McCarthy referred questions to a school spokesman Thursday.

Transgender Groups Call For Expansion of Texas Hate Crimes Act

Few said that while the school remained steadfast about Nikki's senior picture, they agreed to allow a photograph of her in the activity section of the yearbook, wearing her clothing of choice.

The family is considering a lawsuit, but wonders if it's a moot point since the deadline for yearbook production has passed.

In correspondence with the school attorney, the Youngbloods' attorney, Karen Doering of Equality Florida, alleges sex discrimination based on gender stereotypes and free expression violations.

Doering wrote that it comes down to a young girl who wanted to appear as herself in her senior yearbook "rather than conforming to her school administrators' stereotyped notions of how girls should dress.

"The shirt and tie . . . is the attire that is consistent with Nikki's gender identity and expression."

Nikki said she is puzzled about why it was such a big deal, since she was only asking to wear the same clothes as the boys in her class, not something outrageous.

"I told Mom when we walked out (of the studio), "You should have lied and told them my name was Nicholas," said the stocky 5-foot-8 teen. "They would never have known the difference."

Jennifer Middleton, attorney with New York's Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, called the school's decision outrageous. "That gets into a level of discrimination of who that student is," said Middleton, whose organization represents the rights of gays, lesbians and transgender people. "Everybody wants to be in the high school yearbook and you want to look like who you were in your high school years."

Ms. Youngblood had family pictures taken of her daughter dressed in a black tuxedo, tie and Burgundy vest, at Olan Mills studio.

Nikki said she did not buy a yearbook and doubts that it will have her name in it. She had wanted to have the yearbook to look back at years from now, when she gets together with old friends to reminisce. "I can't do that now," she said.

The National Transgender Advocacy Coalition (NTAC) has joined with the Texas Gender Advocacy & Information Network (TGAIN) in calling for an immediate expansion of the Texas Hate Crimes Statute to include gender-identity or gender non-conformity. The statute known as the James Byrd Hate Crimes Protection Act, passed both houses of the Texas legislature last session, and was signed into law by Gov. Rick Perry.

The historic piece of legislation does not, however, cover gender-identity or gender non-conformity. What that means is that the transgender or intersexed communities can be victimized by hate-violence, and that there are no added penalties - as with other protected categories, such as race, religion, age or sexual orientation - which would act as a deterrent.

The reason for the call is yet another death in Houston that gives the appearance of a Hate-related murder. The body of twenty-seven year old Bibi Barajas (born Hugo Cesar Barajas) was found dumped in the breezeway of a business complex near Chimney Rock and Glenmont - an area known for prostitution.

With the legislative re-districting, there is concern about the turnover in the Texas legislature, and subsequently, the odds faced in passing the amendment. "There's going to be a wholesale turnover in the legislature this coming session," said TGAIN executive director, Sarah DePalma. "We've definitely got our work cut out for us."

Since Jan. 1999, there have been nine transgenders murdered in Texas - six of them in Houston alone. Of those six who died in Houston, four were Latina.

"Houston's losing transgendered Latinas at a rate of more than one per year," complained Vanessa Edwards Foster, board vice chair for NTAC. "It's tough to lose this many people - especially so many from the Latina community. What makes it tougher is not having anyone in the legislature see the need for addressing this," Foster finished. "It's very frustrating."

Most who frequent the Chimney Rock / Glenmont area are originally from various Latin American countries,

and poor. Compounding the situation, none of the transsexuals frequenting the area have identification consistent with their gender presentation; making it virtually impossible to secure employment.

"I don't want to be out here," said one of the girls who did not want to give her name. "I want to be home. I want a regular job - I don't want this. But they see my [identification], and they see I'm not a woman ... what can I do?"

With obtaining a consistent drivers license near impossible, it's a virtual guarantee that they will remain permanently unemployed. With no income and often no permanent address, these girls, like Bibi Barajas, find the only income they can make to survive - the illegal variety.

Until there is a way to inject transgenders into the workplace, this scenario will only continue to play out on the streets of Houston, and all medium and large cities in the state. And until Hate Crimes among the transgendered or intersexed (hermaphrodites) are addressed, there will be little deterrent for those who wish to target them for violence or murder.

In the meantime, the girls in the various "hookers' strolls" in Houston continue trying to survive; feeling much more vulnerable ... and much more afraid.

All-or-nothing on trans rights

by Penny Weaver

In light of the most recent transgender murder in Houston, advocates for trans Texans last week demanded that the state's hate crimes law be amended to include gender identity or gender non-conformity. The law already includes specific protected categories, including sexual orientation. It provides enhanced penalties for those convicted of targeting someone for violence because of their actual or perceived membership in one of those categories.

When it comes to civil rights, gays should practice what they preach: Everyone should be treated equally, without regard to sexual orientation and, yes, gender identity.

But the Texas state legislature isn't the only powerful

group that local trans feel a cold shoulder from. The Texas Gender Advocacy & Information Network (TGAIN) plans protests at next week's Human Rights Campaign annual gala in Houston. Trans activists decry the HRC's strategic decision to keep gender identity out of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which would protect gays from workplace bias. About a year ago, HRC added the "T" to its mission to advocate for LGBT rights, but the group does not support adding gender identity to ENDA, arguing that such a move likely would kill the legislation, according to HRC spokesman Wayne Besen.

So members of our community line up, once again, on different sides of the same rope, playing tug-of-war to determine how inclusive our civil rights movement should be. It's already a politically correct requirement to list "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender" when referring to anyone who isn't heterosexual. It can't be good enough to say "gay" and let people infer that you are including all "non-straight." Better say LGBT, lest you be chastised for excluding someone.

After all, inclusion is at the core of our demands for equal civil rights for gays. We don't want to be divided from straights and given lesser rights and secondary status. We want to be treated equally. We demand equal freedoms and civil rights, regardless of sexual orientation.

Practical vs. principle

HRC officials and other gay leaders contend that including gender identity and gender non-conformity as protected categories in ENDA will prevent the bill from passing. Trans activists contend that inclusion would not endanger the legislation. They say members of Congress tell them that an all-encompassing ENDA could pass. One side says activists should push what they realistically can expect to get made into law. Later, they contend, trans folks can be added to the protections.

The trans side says everyone should be included. Both gender identity and gender non-conformity should be among protected statuses for American workers, they argue. The fight is an ironic one for a movement whose beginning is marked by the Stonewall Riots led largely by drag queens and other gender-benders.

It may be practical to only include in ENDA the categories that are deemed acceptable enough to pass

Congressional muster. But advocating for what society can handle right now, instead of what society should do, is shortsighted. Gays cannot in good conscience expect justice for themselves while leaving transgenders out of the formula. As Coretta Scott King has said, "An injustice to one is an injustice to all."

Gay leaders seem to be saying, "We'll take what we can get," rather than, "We'll take what is right." But it is inconsistent for gays to ask for inclusion while simultaneously excluding transgender rights.

No, sexual orientation and gender non-conformity are not the same things, not by far. But when it comes to civil rights, gays demand inclusion and should practice what they preach: Everyone should be treated equally, as human beings, regardless of immaterial characteristics such as gay, straight or trans, black or white, old or young. Whatever label we choose -- gay, straight, bisexual, lesbian, transgender -- we have much more that unites us than separates us. With or without labels, we each are human. We love, we hurt, we laugh, we cry. Most of us have experienced discrimination personally -- and most of us have discriminated against someone else.

Just as gays expect to be included in legal protections for minorities, let gays include transgenders in that same fight against discrimination. If it takes longer or is a tougher fight for ENDA to become law, so be it.

An ENDA that itself discriminates but becomes law would be a hollow and shortsighted victory. Let's hope that no matter which side we are on, we can all see that we are pulling on the same rope, all working for equality. When we begin to understand how many more similarities we all have than differences, we will begin to achieve that equality.

Penny Weaver is the editor of the Houston Voice and can be reached at editor@houstonvoice.com

Lobby Days...Mark Your Calendar

By Rick Garcia

Please plan on joining in the Annual Lobby Day in Springfield. This event, sponsored by Equality Illinois is a chance to let our state legislators know our concerns, including HB 101, which has passed the house and is languishing in the senate.

The date is Wednesday, April 10, 2002. Complimentary buses will leave the Equality Illinois Office at 7 a.m., LCCP, Affinity and Bolingbrook (8:00 a.m.), and return at about 11 p.m.

The day will begin with a legislative briefing, followed by meetings with senators and representatives to lobby them to support gender issues. A noon rally is also planned, to be followed by a cocktail party from 4-6 p.m., before returning to Chicago. For more information on this event or to RSVP call Rick Trainor at Equality Illinois (773 477 7173).

(Editor's Note: This is a chance for ITI members to demonstrate our commitment to transgender rights within Illinois. We need a great turnout from members to make sure our voices are heard in Springfield!)

Feedback . . .

Problems? Questions? Disagreements? Want to submit an article? Please write to us. We love to get mail.

It's Time, Illinois! Board Members:

Chair:

Beth Plotner
BethJD@earthlink.net

First Vice Chair:

Lisa Scheps
Lscheps@mindspring.com

Second Vice Chair:

Marsha Jackson
Marsha J@aol.com

Secretary:

Tina Wood-Sievers
Tinawood1956@cs.com

Treasurer:

Carole Abrams
CAROLE1672@aol.com

Past Chair:

Miranda Stevens-Miller
MirandaSt1@aol.com

Gay, transgender activists disagree on N.Y. bill

A New York State anti-discrimination bill has more support this year than it's had in the 30 previous years that it's been proposed in the state legislature, but a disagreement between a gay rights group and a transgender rights group could hinder its passage, Newsday reports. The problem, according to transgender activists, is that the Sexual Orientation Non Discrimination Act, which has already passed the state assembly and has the support of Republican governor George Pataki, does not include protections based on gender identity.

"Basic human rights will continue to be denied to the trans community without an amendment to this bill," said Joann Prinzavalli, a member of the New York State Transgender Coalition. But the Empire State Pride Agenda, a New York gay rights group that has been pushing for passage of SONDA for years, said any amendments to the bill at this point in the game would ruin its chances of passage. "We've waited long enough to get this done, and any last-minute, ill-prepared attempt to amend the bill is going to kill it," said ESPA spokesman Joe Tarver.

Assemblyman Steve Sanders, one of the bill's sponsors, echoed Tarver's concern and added that he thinks transgendered people would be covered under the language of the bill as it's currently written. Still, transgender activists told Newsday that they are tired of taking a backseat in the fight for civil rights. "We helped [gay people] get where they are, and they've sold us down the river," said Sylvia Rivera, director of Street Transgender Action Revolutionaries.

Application for New or Renewal Membership

YES, I would like to join (____) or renew (____) my membership in It's Time, Illinois!

Name(s) _____

Name to Be Used on Mailing Label (if different from above) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP+4 _____

Home Telephone _____ Work Telephone _____

E-mail Address _____

Membership Level (check one):

(____) Annual - \$15 (____) Supporting - \$35 (____) Household - \$50 (____) Sustaining - \$75
(____) Benefactor - \$150 (____) Lifetime - \$250 (____) Other - \$ _____

How would you like to be involved with It's Time Illinois? (Please check all that apply.)

(____) Keep informed by newsletters (____) Participate in monthly meetings

(____) Participate in actions (____) Join a working group or committee

(____) Liaison with other human rights groups. Please specify _____

(____) Do you have any special skills that could help us out? (legal / legislative, artistic / design, technical / computer)

Please specify: _____

Have you ever been a victim of a hate crime or discriminated against because of your gender identity, expression, or image? Yes / No (circle one)

If yes, may we document your case for our report? Yes / No (circle one)

Please mail, along with your check or money order, to:

It's Time, Illinois, P.O. Box 3932, Oak Park, IL 60303-393