

I have lived in NYC since 1959. I feel that this is the only material I have seen which not only accurately describes the Stonewall riots but the very important years just prior to Stonewall.

The advances which occurred in the period from 1965 - 1969 gave gay people in this city their first sense of legitimate gay space. The police, who planned the Stonewall raid, unfortunately for themselves, did not take this new sense of "gay legitimacy" into account and the rest became history.

Stonewall marks the turning point from gay subculture to gay community I think. Enjoy.

BACK TO OUR FUTURE?

A Walk on the Wild Side of Stonewall

by Robert Amsel

From: The ADVOCATE

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Ten years ago, I saw a gay play performed in a large rented room of a London pub. The play was about the Stonewall riots and their effect on ending antigay oppression in America. The improvised set represented the bar area of the Stonewall Inn. The time in the play: 3 a.m., June 28, 1969.

The scene: A young man was "chatting up" another young man. The attempted seduction was subtle, interspersed with dialogue to reveal the dangers of being openly gay in New York: the possibility of police entrapment, arrest, resultant job loss. Lots of message. Lots of flat American a's mingling with British r's in a weird attempt by the actors to sound American. The second young man appeared to be a sympathetic listener, so sympathetic that the first young man was led to invite him back to his apartment. Surprise! Out popped the second man's badge. He was a plainclothes cop, and the first man was under arrest for sexual solicitation.

The last straw. The Stonewall patrons could bear no more. Riot time -- and so the gay movement in America was born. Our British brothers, viewing this spectacle, were meant to emulate their American brothers.

In the resounding applause that followed I sat speechless, but not with pent-up emotion. More like ... amazement. My British friend next to me waited breathlessly for my comment. My slack jaw finally closed. "At least they got the time right," I said.

I had lived in New York and was involved in the gay movement. Ditto the riots - the second night through the following Wednesday. Still, I had never grasped the mythic possibilities to Stonewall until that moment in a foreign country. I told my friend that the play was useful, perhaps even inspiring. Thoughts of Graham Greene's "The Power and the Glory" flashed through my mind; it is the story of a sinful priest who dies for the faith and achieves sainthood, only to have his life sanitized in the official retelling. But my friend wanted the truth about the Stonewall. And I told him.

This time HIS jaw fell open, as often happens when illusion hits the dust. Maybe I should have kept my mouth shut, since, in 1977, British gays needed a myth.

Now, 18 years have passed since the Stonewall riots. Even when they happened, not everyone agreed that they were riots. The New York Times dismissed them as a "rampage," a 45-minute "melee" (June 29, 1969, page 33). In the Times' second coverage the melee became a "near-riot" (June 30, page 22). Of the straight papers only The Village Voice took what happened half-seriously. The Voice had to; their offices were half a block from the Stonewall.

They were indeed riots; check a dictionary. But back in 1969, straights could not conceive of gays in revolt. Many thought that all faggots were revolting - but not riotous, except in their colorful clothes. This attitude was apparently shared by the nine cops who made the mistake of taking on the Stonewall without a back-up militia.

We've come a long way since then. The Stonewall myth, beatified, has inspired gay protest movements throughout America and the world. But considering the miles this legend has covered, perhaps a retread job, or at least realignment, is in order.

To grasp the Stonewall phenomenon one must go back further than 1969, for in that year New York gay bars WERE legal. In 1965, however, they were not. The New York State Liquor Authority had arbitrarily decided that any meeting of three or more homosexuals in a bar was provocation for the bar to lose its license. Homosexuals were perceived as "immoral" and "undesirable" characters who brought ill-repute and disorder to any drinking establishment. During Mayor Robert Wagner's administration, bar raids became everyday occurrences. The liquor authorities simply needed a gentle reminder of the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights, in which people are given the right to peaceably assemble.

The man who reminded them was Dick Leitsch, president of the Mattachine Society of New York (MSNY), one of the few gay rights organizations in the city at that time. Leitsch was one of the first Mattachine leaders who dared to use his own name - to seek publicity to expose oppression, and to use the courts to sue for homosexual rights. He was also charming and charismatic, a well-polished Kentuckian who presented a much-needed "regular guy" image. In addition, he had what many of the later, more radical gay leaders lacked: a sense of humor. His parents, I believe, had been among the first white members of the NAACP in Louisville. Leitsch greatly admired Martin Luther King's nonviolent methods in forcing integration, and he attempted to emulate King in his own political sphere. In 1966, Leitsch organized a "sip-in" demonstration to create a test case against the liquor authority, the purpose of which was to legitimize gay bars.

(Several years later, in 1971, Gay Liberation Front member John Murphy wrote that this was a "dubious" achievement that "perpetuated the cycle of ghettos and insularity that has kept the gay world from confronting the straight world." Murphy failed to understand that in those days, gay bars were the only institution that we had. It was possible to meet other gay people at churches, schools, various clubs, etc., but it was also furtive and dangerous. Leitsch felt we needed a safe haven, and the gay bar had traditionally served that function.)

Leitsch contacted all of New York's daily newspapers and The Village Voice. He told them that he and two other Mattachine members were planning to meet at a particular Greenwich Village bar and announce to the lucky bartender, "We are homosexuals and

wish to be served." If a bartender knowingly served homosexuals, he jeopardized his bar's liquor license. If he refused, MSNY was ready to instigate a lawsuit.

The big day arrived. The tree gay men and members of the press met at the bar. The introductory request was delivered. The smiling bartender said he didn't give a damn if they were orangutans, so long as they had money to pay for the drinks. Then everyone sat down and had a drink. The test case was not progressing well.

The rather sizable group moved on to another bar. "We are homosexuals..." They were served again. The press was getting fidgety. Everyone downed their drinks and they tried a third bar. Served again. Frustrated and slightly high, the group headed for Julius's, what today is the oldest existing gay bar in Manhattan. In 1966 Julius's had been having trouble with the liquor authority. At long last a bartender said, "Then I'm sorry, I can't serve you." Dick nearly hugged him.

The press scribbled away as Leitsch explained that the Mattachine Society, along with the ACLU, was planning to sue Julius's. But not to worry, he said, the society would pay all of Julius's legal expenses. The object was simply to have the liquor authority's anti-homosexual policies overturned.

The threatened lawsuit never materialized. The New York Liquor Authority turned over the policy voluntarily - after learning from their lawyers that they didn't stand a chance in hell of winning. Also, the press was behind Leitsch, and a liberal public in New York City had been made aware of the authority's discriminatory policies. The battle was won - not with a bang, but a whimper. Gay bars became legal.

On to the next struggle; the ending of police entrapment. Vice cops, the handsomer the better, dressed as real people and continued frequenting bars - which were now legal, and where more and more gay people congregated. When an unsuspecting patron propositioned the cop, the two men would normally leave the bar. Outside, the badge would flash and the patron would be arrested. The victim would usually plead guilty and pay a fine, all the while praying for as little publicity as possible. Many victims lost their jobs, broke up with their families, or, in a few cases, faced eviction. MSNY's legal associates helped anyone who wanted to plead not guilty. Generally, the lawyers won their cases; judges were sick to death of the multitude of such cases clogging their schedules. They were also skeptical of the same tired cops telling the same story again and again.

Fortunately, Mayor Wagner, the man most responsible for the above policy, was replaced by a liberal Republican, John V. Lindsay. Shortly after taking office, handsome John organized a town meeting to hear grievances from city residents. Dick Leitsch brought up the issue of police entrapment. The police commissioner announced that such practices had been discontinued.

At the very same time, however, back at Julius's, an Episcopal minister was eating a sandwich, but lost his appetite when he witnessed the entrapment and arrest of a young man in the back room. The minister promptly phoned another minister, who phoned the mayor and anyone else of importance he could think of. A meeting was held in a Village cafe the next morning; the gathering included the mayor, the police commissioner and his wife, representatives of the ACLU, the musical group The Fugs, and even gay poet Allen Ginsberg. By the end of that meeting, entrapment was gone for good.

A new city policy protecting homosexuals was soon announced. Only a private citizen could bring charges against a homosexual for making an unwanted sexual proposition. This was unfair to women, who had no right to make charges against straight men for similar propositions. But it did get the cops figuratively off our backs. And as Leitsch pointed out with a Pollyanna smile, "I can think of one group of straight men now open to brazen propositions, and they can't do a thing about it." He was referring, of course, to New York's finest, our men in blue. For once, the shoe was on the other flat foot.

MSNY worked well with the new and sympathetic mayor. When it complained to the city's human rights commission about job discrimination in hiring policies, the city's job applications were rewritten. No more could applicants be asked if they were homosexual. (Two notable holdouts were the fire and police departments. It would take a number of years before they surrendered.) Employment thus opened up in January 1967.

So if bars were legitimized and entrapment ended, why the Stonewall riots? Did they really have anything to do with gay rights? If so, what rights were being won?

The legend of the Stonewall was born as another legend died. On Sunday, June 22, 1969, Judy Garland was found dead from a pill overdose in her London home. An older generation of homosexuals had idolized Judy, as much for her suffering as her talent. Her unsuccessful marriages, her dependence on pills and liquor, and her resilience - the ability to rise when she was down - gave them hope that whatever their oppression, they too could find the strength to carry on. But now Judy was down and would stay down, and the old gay way of endurance seemed to pass with her.

But while the flags hung at half mast on Fire Island, new flags were about to be raised on the streets of Greenwich Village. Friday afternoon, June 27, Judy was buried. Saturday morning, June 28, the raid on the Stonewall Inn began. "We will endure" became "We shall overcome."

The Stonewall Inn was located at 53 Christopher Street, off Sheridan Square. It was an after-hours "private club" for members only. Anyone who could scrounge up three bucks could become a member for the evening. The place was reputed to be Mafia-owned (as were most of the gay bars in those days) and liquor was sold on the premises without benefit of a liquor license. This made it a perfect target for the authorities.

There were many gay people at the time who supported the raid on the Stonewall. They wanted gay bars to be gay-owned and operated. They wanted the Mafia out of the business. They failed to appreciate one thing: the reason the Mafia was in the gay bar business to begin with. The Mafia's traditional sphere of influence centered around any illegal activity. Without the Mafia's money, there might not have been any gay bars to legitimize.

This hardly excuses the Stonewall or its condition. The former owners had been burned out and the bar had remained vacant for a year. Its new owners slapped black paint on the already smoke-blackened walls, and with minimum overhauling were ready for business. It was still a firetrap. It was also a dope drop and the suspected source of a minor hepatitis epidemic six months prior to the raid. Its two large rooms - one a dance area, the other a bar - were generally sardine-packed with young men, including drag queens, hippies, street people, and uptown boys slumming. Many customers were under 18, the legal drinking age. Some were runaways, some had nowhere else to go.

For whatever strange reason, the police that summer decided to launch an all-out attack on illegal clubs throughout the city. They did not limit themselves to gay clubs - straight black and Hispanic clubs were also raided. They did, however, seem to specialize in places frequented by members of minorities. Prior to the Stonewall, there had been raids on other gay after-hours clubs, the Sewer and the Snake Pit, both aptly named. The Tele-Star and the Checkerboard had closed down not long before. By the time the cops hit the Stonewall, the customers were angry, frustrated, and, more important, running out of places to go.

Deputy Inspector Seymour Pine led eight plainclothes officers (including two women) into the Stonewall at 3 a.m. It was a hot night and a full moon was shining over Sheridan Square. The employees were arrested for selling liquor without a license. The customers were allowed to leave, one at a time. They waited outside for their friends. Many had been in such raids before, some in the past few weeks.

One straight observer referred to the gathering as "festive," with those exiting the club striking poses, swishing and camping. Then he noted a sudden mood change when the paddywagon arrived and the bartender, doorman, three drag queens and a struggling lesbian were shoved inside. There were catcalls and cries to topple the paddy wagon. Pine hurriedly told the wagon to take off, drop the prisoners off at the Sixth Precinct and rush back. The crowd threw coins at the police and shouted "Pigs!" Coins progressed to bottles. The crowd was closing in. Pine and his detectives moved quickly back into the Stonewall and locked themselves in.

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The "mood change" reported was not a mood change at all. Camping it up had long been a way of passive resistance. By joking and being "outrageous," one could somehow neutralize the reality of harassment. Suddenly, watching the prisoners as they were roughly shoved into the wagon, the crowd felt a surge of reality rushing in. Their turf had been invaded; camping was not deterring their callous persecutors. The hidden anger exploded.

There were many witnesses to report what happened outside the Stonewall. Fortunately, there was also one witness to report what happened inside. Village Voice reporter Howard Smith, sniffing a good story, was hot on the scent as he rushed into the building. The police bolted the door. The Stonewall front was mostly brick, except for windows, boarded within by plywood. Part of Smith's account:

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 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] 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 gay, releasing their anger on this sample from the mob.

The victim was Dave Van Ronk, a popular Village folk singer. Van Ronk admitted to throwing a few coins. Again, from Howard Smith's report:

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...

The door is smashed open again (with an uprooted parking meter). 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...

A door over to the side almost gives. One cop shouts. "Get away from there or I'll shoot!" It starts 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 adrenalin rush bolsters all of us; they all take out and check pistols...

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."...

I can only see the arm at the window. It squirts 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... It was that close...

The first riot lasted 45 minutes. The New York Times claimed that 400 youths participated. They claimed the same number for the next evening's riot. Gay observers estimated in the thousands, at least for the second one.

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Police reinforcements had arrived en masse, extinguished the fire and cleared the area. Howard Smith went outside and took more notes. He returned inside to discover that the police had vented their anger by smashing all the mirrors, juke boxes, phones, toilets, and cigarette machines. No one but the police had been inside, but the courts would later find them innocent of vandalism.

Stonewall management found it difficult to keep their customers inside Saturday night, since all the action was outside. Shouts of "Gay Power!" and "Liberate Christopher Street!" echoed along Sixth and Seventh avenues, and Greenwich Avenue (where incarcerated lesbians in the House of Detention shouted support from their barred windows). The battle cry raged the length of Christopher Street.

There was a strong feeling of gay community and a strong fighting spirit, an intoxicating sense of release. It was "us against them, and by God, we're winning." Crowds were growing, as if from the pavement. There was kissing, hugging, fondling. Tanned bodies merged together like some orgy scene in a Cecil B. DeMille epic. Craig Rodwell, owner of a gay bookstore in the Village, reported that some gay men were barricading the streets and not allowing heterosexual drivers to pass. A car of newlyweds was half lifted before the openmouthed bride and groom were allowed to drive on.

New York's Tactical Police Force (TPF) arrived on the scene. They were helmeted and carried clubs. They had rescued Pine and his men the morning before, but were unprepared for the guerrilla warfare that awaited them.

These streets were gay territory. Gay people knew every doorway, alley and side street and where they would lead. They knew how to split up the TPF and run them in circles. Men on roofs or in rooms overlooking Christopher Street hurled bottles at the cops. When the cops looked up, no one could be seen.

Two TPF men chased a gay guy down a side street. Gay bystanders started running with their brother. Before long a large group was running. A man at the head of the group suddenly held out his arms and yelled, "Stop!" The group stopped. "There are two pigs and how many of us?" A moment of meaningful silence. The two cops had also stopped, were looking at one another and then at the crowd. The group leader grinned. "Get the bastards!" About face. The cops were now running at full gallop, a lynch mob on their heels. "Catch'em! Fuck'em!"

The crowd dispersed by 3 a.m.

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Sunday night was quiet. Monday and Tuesday nights crowds started to gather again, but outbreaks were few and often funny. Dick Leitsch and I were covering the story for the Mattachine Newsletter and reported the following:

"Some of the police maintained enormous 'cool,' but others deliberately tried to provoke trouble. 'Start something, faggot, just start something,' one cop kept telling people. 'I'd like to break your ass wide open.' After saying that to several dozen people, one man turned and said. 'What a Freudian comment, officer!' The cop started swinging..."

There were also two cops in a car cruising the streets, yelling obscenities at passers-by and trying to start a fight. Another stood on the corner of Christopher and Waverly. He swung his nightstick and made nasty cracks to pedestrians. Again, from our newsletter report:

"A wildly 'fem' queen sneaked up behind him, lit a firecracker and dropped it between his feet. It exploded and he jumped into the air in a leap that Villella would have envied, landing on a part of his anatomy that one queen called a 'money-maker.' The queen tossed another firecracker under him, and when it went off a melee followed, during which the cop's badge was lifted. The next day, the badge turned up hanging on a tree in Washington Square Park, stuck into a string of pickled pigs' feet."

This may have been the first gay riot ever, but we certainly did it with panache. The next night, Wednesday, July 2, events took a brutal turn. The TPF men used their nightsticks indiscriminately. "At one point," Leitsch wrote, "7th Avenue from Christopher to West 10th looked like a battlefield in Vietnam. Young people, many of them queens, were lying on the sidewalk, bleeding from the head, face, mouth, and even the eyes. Others were nursing bruised and often bleeding arms, legs, backs and necks."

Another problem, The Voice article had appeared that afternoon. It attracted to the area Black Panthers, Yippies, crazies and street gangs. Looting was rife and shops sympathetic to gay people were hit. Village gays were outraged and blamed the looting on outside exploiters.

Much later I was present at a meeting in MSNY's offices, in which deputy inspectors Pine and Smyth attempted to justify their actions in raiding the Stonewall. Aside from the club's selling liquor without a license, building violations were monumental. They explained how they impounded the liquor, the cash registers, and other evidence, but again denied taking part in the vandalism. They discussed how the Stonewall and other raids were conducted. The management would be arrested, booked, have bail set, and promptly get themselves released. The next day they would get a new supply of liquor and open again. (The Stonewall did open again Saturday night.) The police added that they could not force a place to stay closed, since the courts must first find them guilty. If the management hired a smart lawyer who postponed the case again and again, the bar might stay in business for years before the case came to trial.

So, one might have asked, if the raids were futile, what was the point other than harassment?

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After Wednesday the riots petered out and the politicizing began. Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was a new group of young male and female homosexuals, which formed in late July under the Mattachine umbrella. Political discord reigned. GLF decided to get its feet wet and split completely away from the older society. Whereas MSNY had a liberal but non-radical approach to change, GLF had a leftist ideology and an anarchic structure. They were sort of a gay SDS, and opted for revolution and whatever means were necessary to achieve it. They aligned themselves with and supported all other radical groups of the period. This tended to dissipate their energy somewhat, as did constant arguments over communist factionalism. Some of the outside people or groups they actively supported made very strange bedfellows with them: Malcolm X, H. Rap Brown and Eldredge Cleaver added a hatred of faggotry to their black militant stance; Fidel Castro was shuffling homosexuals off to concentration camps; and Mother Russia was simply sending them to mental hospitals and to Siberia. GLF meetings frequently degenerated into shouting matches.

Marty Robinson, Jim Owles and others in GLF were so disgusted that they broke away entirely and started their own organization, Gay Activists alliance (GAA). Their use of the Greek letter lambda as a symbol of their group and of gay liberation was ultimately popularized across the country and abroad. They brought structure to GAA and limited their endeavors to gay issues. They mailed out political questionnaires (a practice started by Mattachine) and made their growing strength felt at public demonstrations, picketings and zappings. Public confrontation and the disruption of meetings were major tactics. continual zappings of Lindsay alienated older homosexuals who had painful

memories of the pre-Lindsay days. GAA wanted the mayor to issue city ordinances banning private and public employment discrimination against gay people.

Many smaller groups sprang up as well. All the groups suffered from infighting, out-fighting and egos in conflict. But age-old barriers were breaking down. Gay people in other parts of the country were starting to emerge from their closets. California's heavily gay cities of San Francisco and Los Angeles had their own gay renaissance. New Organizations spread throughout the land. A year later, diverse gay groups and independent gays marched in brotherhood and sisterhood. Annual gay pride days would follow.

But there was another side as well. The gay movement, old and new, promoted the freedom to love and love freely. Promiscuity had always existed, but the formerly tight reigns of the law tended to restrict excesses. Suddenly, gay bathhouses flourished, as did gay porn theaters and bookshops. Backroom bars, where every gay fantasy could become a reality, became popular. Police raids on such places still existed, but the resultant flack from the gay community seemed to wear the cops down. Corruption helped, too, as payoffs found their way into the right hands. Cops also felt less hostile after having their consciousness raised by gay representatives at training sessions. Sports events between cops and gays also lessened tension. and an increase in real crime gave cops something better to do with their time. Paraphrasing Lily Langtry, many police felt that "it's better they do it inside than out on the street and frighten the tourists." And gay people DID do it. Often. The oppressive years seemed gone forever, and New Yorkers wanted to make up for lost time.

A decade after Stonewall, in this carefree, extra-fertile soil, a deadly virus was imported. It quietly, swiftly spread before anyone was the wiser.

AIDS is producing a backlash stronger and more lethal than anything we knew in our cozy closets. Homophobes always feared that gayness might rub off. Now they fear that death might rub off along with it.

All homosexuals, healthy or sick, are being grouped together as the lepers of the '80s. Across the nation bills that would take our freedoms away are being voted upon. The sick among us cannot fight. The strong and healthy must.

And that is why the Stonewall should be remembered today. It doesn't matter that it was a firetrap, that the police may have been doing us a favor. It doesn't matter that the gutsier fighters were drags and street kids, while the leather numbers peeked out of doorways. What matters is the communal gay spirit born during that time and put aside during the Reagan Me-First years. Unless we recapture that spirit and do battle, we'll be ripe for the Me-Next years, a time when "camp" is something that follows "concentration."

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Subject: The Snake Pit Raid, March 8, 1970

The following information is from "Dancing the Gay Lib Blues, A Year in the Homosexual Liberation Movement" by (the late) Arthur Bell, one of the founders of the Gay Activists Alliance (the offshoot of the Gay Liberation Front). The book was published in 1971.

The event in question took place in the early morning hours of March 8, 1970, and inspired a quickly organized protest that very night.

The man who was injured was Diego Vinales. He jumped out the window of the police station and landed on a spiked fence, which left him critically injured. Rumors that he had died originated with a false news broadcast, which led people to comment that the gay movement had its first martyr.

The GAA organized the protest, distributing a pamphlet that said, "Any way you look at it, Diego Vinales was pushed. We are all being pushed. A march on the Sixth Precinct will take place tonight, March 8, at 9pm, gathering at Sheridan Square. Anyone who calls himself a human being, who has the guts to stand up to this horror, join us. A silent vigil will occur immediately following the demonstration."

At the protest, Arthur Bell met the lover of "Schatzy," the owner of the Snake Pit. He took this man out for a drink and interviewed him for "Gay Power". The interviewee did not want his name used. Mr. Bell reprints the interview in his book. Reprinted here without permission:

I was at the door, about five A.M., at the Snake Pit, with my lover, Schatzy, when the raid took place. The Pit is not Mafia controlled. It's what we call in our profession a legally run place, but it's open after hours. It's run by Schatzy alone, and he takes care of everybody. He's known by everybody in the village. He's beautiful people. But to operate in the Village you have to pay off. I can tell you down to the last penny what Schatzy pays and I can tell you who he pays, but I'm not authorized to say that.

Tonight everybody was out yelling for the captain of the Sixth Precinct. He had little to do with the raid. We pay these people off, but when someone bigger steps in, then the smaller cops have to do something.

Deputy Inspector Seymour Pine of the First Division is the guy behind the raids. Pine is looking for a reputation. He wants to be chief inspector. Pine said last night that he was going to close the Village up. The precinct is riled up about gays.

About five A.M. a guy showed up at the door of the Pit with a warrant. He said, "Can I talk to you for a minute?" Schatzy stepped outside the door. They pushed him back and forced their way in.

Then they took us away. Nobody told us about our rights or why we were being arrested. Nobody was told a word. I tried to ask a cop when they were arresting us, "What rights do we have?" and the cop said, "Shut your fucking mouth."

We were treated like animals at the station. We were all herded into one big room. There was a shoeshine machine there. A couple of the kids turned on the machine and started shining their shoes and the cops started coming over and getting mad. One cop

came and called me a faggot. He said, "You're nothing but a prick," and said, "I'm going to tear off both of your fucking feet if you don't get off that machine."

If the Snake Pit was a straight bar, everyone would have been let go. If it was a straight after-hours bar, they would have taken in the people who ran the place. But this guy Pine wants to make it really big, so he takes all these people in, gives them a summons and tells them when he gives them a summons you don't have to show if you don't want to. Nobody pays bail. But the idea is to drag everybody down there and make a big scene about illegally running a bar after hours. After the Stonewall riot last summer they tried to cool it down for a while, but they're starting up again. The cops took all the money from Schatzky's cash register, and the kids' tips. They didn't return any of it. About four hundred dollars.

The cops had no legal right to enter the way they entered. They had no legal right to drag all those people down and give them a summons then tell them they didn't have to show up. Let's face it. If those people who were arrested really got up tight about it, they could turn around and sue whoever they wanted to sue because of false arrest. They can't prove disorderly conduct, they can't even prove that those people were there. The people who were arrested weren't checked for identification or pills or anything. It was a sick, illegal thing.

Diego Vinales was frightened stiff. My own opinion is that he didn't know what was happening. He'd never been in anything like this before. He was afraid maybe he'd be put in jail or something like that. Diego ran up the stairs and tried to jump from the window to the other ledge and didn't make it.

I was at the window right after he landed on the spikes. The remarks the cops made after this happened were unbelievable. One cop said to a fireman, "You don't have to hurry, he's dead, and if he's not, he's not going to live long." I was with three or four kids when one of the kids heard crying and screaming out. Then the other kids started crying. They saw what was happening and they were shaken. But the remarks kept coming from the cops. They probably thought they were justified. Diego was a faggot, they said. They used the word faggot so many times it was unbelievable.

Diego had a friend whom he came in with last night. I had never seen him before but he was sort of an average guy, from what I could make out talking to him. Diego was good-looking, about twenty-five, had a beautiful body. He lived in Jersey, and said he came from Argentina.

We'll probably have a martyr in Diego if he doesn't pull through this, and it hurts me that we may have one. I feel so sorry that this happened. It may be good for the cause, but no man's life is worth any amount of money or sacrifice. A man's life is sacred.

At the police station one of the straight cops just shook his head. He said, "I'm sorry. I'm just plain sorry."

My own head hurts. I still hear Diego crying out in pain and I hear him moaning and screaming. It isn't easy to shake.

Follow-up also from the book:

My interview with Schatzy's lover appeared as a front page story in Gay Power. Shortly thereafter editor John Heys received a telephone call from Inspector Pine explaining his reasons for raiding the Snake Pit -- he was just doing his job. Several days later The New York Times ran a column stating that Democratic-Liberal Representative Edward Koch accused New York City Police Commissioner Howard Leary of permitting the Police Department to resume a policy of harassing homosexuals with illegal arrests. The Times also quoted an executive assistant district attorney as saying that virtually all of the charges of disorderly conduct at the Snake Pit were dismissed in court because "the police could not make a legal case."

[deleted paragraph about seven of those arrested suing the city, still pending as of publication of the book

Four or five weeks later Inspector Pine was transferred from his power post at the First Precinct to the Sixty-second Precinct in the Flatbush area of Brooklyn. GAA immediately ground out a pamphlet for street distribution: "A tree may grow in Brooklyn, but this Pine will wither away."

Meanwhile, news from St. Vincent's was that Diego Vinales was off the critical list. Since he was still technically under arrest and not all owed visitors, I sneaked into the hospital the last week of March with the hope of getting an interview with Diego for Gay Power. He was in a semiprivate ward on the fourth floor. Outside his room the television blared, "Manischewitz wishes you a happy Passover," while eight men in wheelchairs rocked back and forth, their identification tags jiggling on their wrists. There was a feeling of conviviality in the hallway, even among the two policemen who didn't see me pass by. They, too, were watching television.

Diego Vinales was startled to see a stranger in a trench coat. Apparently I was his first visitor outside of the friend who had accompanied him to the Snake Pit that eventful night. Vinales seemed to want to talk, his voice was weak, and I had to sit close to the bed in order to hear him speak.

He was handsome, all right. Dark hair, shiny eyes, tight skin of a copperish yellow tone. He had three bandages on his body above his waist. His head was propped up with a pillow and he was heavily tranquilized, yet worried about an operation which was due the next day.

But more than the operation, he was worried about his chances of staying in America. He admitted he was in the country illegally -- his visa had expired -- and he was terrified when the police invaded the Snake Pit, terrified enough to attempt escape, terrified enough to jump from a second-story window.

He said he wanted to get well, to return to his job and live a quiet life. He suspected that his parents in Argentina might have heard about the Snake Pit incident. He hadn't written to them, but he had relatives in the States who might have picked up the news and transmitted it to his family.

He said that the visit to the Snake Pit was his first to a gay bar in New York. He had been to the Village only once before, to take in the local sights. He did not talk much about the raid, or about the scars and wounds he'll be carrying with him for the rest of his life. He was grateful for the support from the various gay groups. He asked that I

call him by his nickname, Tito, and made me promise to come back again as soon as he removed from his next operation. I promised him I would, and I did.

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Jack Carroll "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of
<KEVXU@CUNYVM> memory against forgetting."
Milan Kundera