

Some Thoughts on a Concert Disruption

By Lee Swislow

On March 1 in San Francisco the 11th Annual Women and the Law Conference sponsored a concert featuring Linda Tillery, Mary Watkins, and Sweet Honey in the Rock. Joining Tillery on stage were two back-up musicians, including Ray Obiedo, a guitarist and — more to the point — a man.

His presence led to an outburst of rage by a small group of women who felt their best response to this was to yell "Get the prick off the stage" and to throw things at the musicians (trash, tomatoes and cigarette butts, according to *Plexus*, a San Francisco area women's newspaper). In a confrontation following the concert in the lobby outside the concert hall, Sally Kilberg, a conference organizer, was allegedly slapped in the face by one of these women.

The April issue of *Plexus* contains a number of letters about this event. The disruptors are accused of racism, antifeminist actions, and throwing a fascist tantrum. The women who walked out claimed it was an assault to be confronted by a man on the stage and an insult to be given the finger by Linda Tillery as part of her response to their disruption.

I don't know how significant this event was in terms of disturbing the concert. It sounded bad in *Plexus*. But when I talked with Nancy Polikoff, a Washington D.C. woman who was there, she said she didn't think more than half of the people attending really knew what was going on. She was sitting near the front and didn't see anything thrown, though that could have happened. "It's a big place," she said. "It holds thousands."

Nancy saw the confrontation outside the hall between some of the concert organizers and the women who had disrupted. "Anyone would say these women were physically threatening — standing very close and yelling. They wouldn't

stop yelling and they wouldn't go away."

Yet this is an event that does have significance as a statement about the lesbian community.

Some women, in the name of righteous anger over being confronted by a man where they expected only women, felt assaulted enough to yell, to threaten, to throw things, to disrupt. I read this, think about this, and ask — is this my movement?

And sadly enough, the answer is yes.

I suppose I should start with the immediate cause — a man on the stage. In the publicity, women musicians were advertised as Tillery's back-up band. Obiedo was an unexpected substitute, though Tillery had told some of the conference organizers two weeks in advance.

Musically, I don't think it mattered that he was there — with eyes closed, I doubt many would recognize the sounds of a male guitar.

Psychically/emotionally — I suppose it could be argued. It was a big concert with over 2000 people there, mostly women, but many men. It was not women's space.

But that is really missing the point. Those who disrupted the concert felt violated at being confronted by a man and being expected to listen to him perform. That was the outrage that took precedence over all else and gave license for their actions.

And for me, this is the point — that some women have reached a place of such righteousness that anything goes. At any moment any one may become an enemy and deserve treatment as such.

On one level, I don't even care about the reasons Linda Tillery asked a man to play with her, as I find my feelings so focused on the response she received.

Yet I do care; they are important. In all the controversy

about the concert, Linda Tillery — her presence and her statement — get lost. Tillery is a black lesbian feminist who has been vocal and strong about all those parts of her life and her politics.

She may have asked Ray Obiedo to play with her just because she needed a guitarist and he was available. More likely, she thought about what it meant to ask a man to play with her. I can think about it in many ways — as a statement about racial unity, about sharing our space, about acknowledging that we have brothers as well as sisters.

It's not just respect for Linda Tillery's choice that vanished with the shouts and catcalls — it is the whole idea that we learn and grow from each other's lives and decisions and that we should delight in this.

It was not an extraordinary event that Linda Tillery's concert was disrupted. There are politics that encouraged and led to the disruption.

I've always felt a mix of loving and hating in the women's movement — the excitement of loving women and the rage of hating men. As women we have plenty to be angry about and it has been powerful and liberating to acknowledge that rage.

For me, letting in some of that anger meant opening myself to a torrent of feeling. Yet the anger still seemed like something to be recognized and allowed, but not something to be dominated by. A feeling born from the injustices of this society — but not a feeling on which to build a new one.

It's hard to know how to build a new society and a new culture. Loving women? There's been a lot of disappointment there. The early feeling in the women's movement was that we could all love each other and be friends and find closeness and comfort because we were all women.

Except we were all different women, coming from different places, growing at different paces, making different

Recollections of Boston's Gay M

By John Kyper

Washington seems to be a city I have known by the various demonstrations I have attended there. Once I spent a night in the local jail with 85 Vietnam veterans and their friends, after we had occupied the Lincoln Memorial to protest the continuing war. A year later I joined with many of these same people to demonstrate again, during Nixon's second inaugural.

The gay march in October was my fifth visit, and it brought back many memories of the first time I was in the city, at the National Mobilization a decade before, which had also been held on the grounds of the Washington Monument. The counterdemonstrators at the march this past October, with their "Repent or Perish" banners, had the same hate-contorted expressions as those who had carried the "Bomb Hanoi" signs in 1969. (One of them I had seen last spring harassing a gay demonstration in Berkeley, wearing the same huge banner — it was almost a sail — that was mounted on his back with an elaborate contraption of aluminum poles. They were at it again at the march on Sacramento in January. New Right money at work?) And the inane chants of the Revolutionary Socialist League — "Jimmy Carter kiss my ass!" was one — reminded me of the macho adventurism of the Weathermen, who had attacked the Justice Department and gotten many of the rest of us gassed.

Only later did I learn about the New York Gay Liberation Front's contingent at the Mobilization, which had created quite a little sensation. Had I seen it I would likely have been very threatened: I was then in the final throes of coming out. However, three weeks later I would have eagerly joined them.

Ten years. I opened the 1970s by making love to another man for the first time, on New Year's Day. At 22, I was finally achieving a sense of myself as a complete, sexual being. It was a revelation to discover all around me Boston's hitherto invisible gay community. From my experience as a would-be student activist at the University of Vermont, I realized that if I didn't like what I saw, then it was up to me to help change it. Countless others were coming to the same conclusion at the same time.

Conscientious objection had led, inexorably, to gay liberation. By my refusal to "measure up" as a Man and become a trained killer for the State, I had come to see that my Manhood was dispensable. To assume an unnatural machismo would be self-destructive of all that I most valued.

The 1960s had been a difficult time: repressed adolescence that emerged, too slowly, into uncertain adulthood. Contrary to the general stereotype, the decade just passed was far more purposeful and fulfilling than were those tortured years, or the wretched decade that had come before. Growing up in the small towns and cities of Northern New England, I was the last to recognize the truth spoken by the other boys who taunted me as "queer," unable to appreciate the unintended compliment of being called a "sissy." I had heard of those twisted creatures called homosexuals, but I could not identify with them. Instead, like David in *Word Is Out*, I assumed in my lonely existence that I was incapable of loving.

Freshman Army ROTC was the biggest influence in resolving my doubts about the interminable war in Vietnam. (My instructors would have been horrified to learn that theirs was the most influential course I took during my three years at Vermont.) After much agonizing, I finally admitted, during the long, hot summer of 1967, that I was against the war.

My decision to oppose the war was the most radical thing I have ever done. The strength I had developed after being taunted had enabled me to see through the patriotic hysteria and official rationale justifying the war. From this initial move I soon realized that I had to question everything that had been presented to me. My childhood indoctrination no longer

provided the answers when I began to probe whether an imperial America was really serving my needs or the needs of the majority of the American people. I decided I could not serve in the military under any circumstances. I would not let my ROTC instructors mold me (to use their term) into an officer.

As I questioned I began to assert my need to live my life for myself. A family fight that Christmas led to an explosion, when I ended up screaming that I wasn't going to play "baby brother" any longer, after 20 years. It was a catharsis. I ended up for two weeks on a psychiatric ward, which proved to be the refuge I needed. During one of the sessions with my doctor, I recognized, with a shock, the truth about my sexuality, after I had described my sexual fantasies.

I needed two more years, and many false starts, before I could find myself. I felt pitifully naive, unsure of where to begin. I took a semester off from school and worked for six months (incongruously) as a psychiatric aide at Vermont State Hospital. For the first time I met open gays among the staff, who demonstrated that homosexuality was more than the simple-minded stereotype. I also met several closet cases there and recognized how unhappy they were because of what they were trying to repress — visions of what I feared I could become. (One was an alcoholic who was alternately a patient and an aide; another, who insisted I couldn't possibly be homosexual after I had told him I thought I was, later tried to kill himself.)

Some of the gay aides were very helpful and supportive. Yet with all of the good advice in the world, I still had to learn for myself and make my own mistakes. There were times when I was obsessed with the thought of suicide (but not the will to try it), and I was exploited in a couple of fumbling sexual explorations in YMCAs. Once I was raped, and I began to think homosexuality was characterized by exploitation and impersonality.

Intimately connected with my struggle for sexual identity was my need to confront the draft. I became increasingly disturbed by my student deferment, a middle class privilege that allowed me to protest the war while remaining immune to its consequences. And when I held a temporary psychiatric exemption I realized that I had a vested interest in remaining "mentally ill" that seemed to be sabotaging my attempts to get myself together. I was too repressed, too frightened, to consider "checking the box" at the draft physical and becoming exempt as a homosexual.

For a long time I was absorbed in the dilemma of whether to resist the draft or become a conscientious objector. Resistance was clearly the "most moral" choice (I thought), but prison seemed to promise the terrors of the unknown, especially while I was going through my prolonged sexual crisis. In the end I decided to "compromise" with myself, and I performed two years' alternate service in a Boston hospital.

In the autumn I returned for what was to be my last year at the University. I was fired up for student activism, but 1968 had been a very disillusioning year, after the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. Pope Paul's condemnation of birth control symbolized for me the resurgent orthodoxy that was striking back at dissidence everywhere. The sight of Soviet tanks in the streets of Prague was quickly mirrored by the spectacle of berserk cops on the streets of Chicago. I felt like I was beholding the resurrection of those twin bogeymen of the Cold War, Joseph Stalin and Joseph McCarthy. And after all the dust had settled, we ended up with a choice between Hubert Humphrey, an apologist for Johnson's war, a media creation called "the New Nixon" — and George Wallace. I didn't regret not being quite old enough to vote.

Radical politics at Vermont seemed no more satisfying:

the place was a hotbed of apathy. I joined the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) as a personal protest against the election, but I found its literature worthless bombast — vindictive and doctrinaire. I was also alienated by the sexism of one particular self-proclaimed leftist Heavy, who called all of his opponents "faggots." By the time an SDS chapter was finally formed on the campus, I was no longer interested. Before the end of the school year we pulled off a successful anti-ROTC rally — an unheard of 600 people — but by then I had decided to leave school.

I moved to Boston in June, 1969. Vermont had seemed to be in the radical bush leagues, and I wanted to go where "the Movement" was. (The state has changed a lot since then, and I often toy with the thought of moving back. Maybe I will, yet.) But 1969 was the year of the fatal SDS split, and I found what was left of the movement furiously ripping itself to shreds, fighting over incredibly obscure differences of dogma. I thought I was watching medieval theologians debating the number of angels on a pin! (Some gay groups, alas, have been no less susceptible to such sectarian nonsense: Witness the split several years ago in the Lavender and Red Union, and its quarreling progeny in the Spartacist League and the Revolutionary Socialist League.) Reconstructing a militarist society was going to take more than the substitution of one male power trip for another.

However, I was inspired with the utopian yet prophetic vision that wars would end only when people refused to fight. I had the good luck to meet several members of the Prisoners' Information and Support Service — PISS, for short — a collective living on the back side of Roxbury's Fort Hill. They were a joyous bunch of draft resisters and their supporters, many of whom I later discovered were gay. Two were about to go back to jail after raiding a South Side Chicago draft board and napping 20,000 files. One of them put my own decision to cooperate into perspective when he said, "Don't go to jail if you don't absolutely feel that you have to." There was no good in consigning myself to a martyrdom I didn't want, or feeling guilty about my choice. The struggle continues everywhere.

At a time when SDS splinters like the Progressive Labor Party and the Weathermen were trying to stampede me into their political guilt trips, preoccupation with the "bourgeois" issue of my sexual orientation seemed incongruous. Yet both the women's and the gay movements grew out of the demise of the male New Left, as women and gay men recognized that the issues of personal existence can be a basis for the most real politics of all. At first I watched the feminists from an envious distance. The sight of such assertive women forced me to confront my own misogyny against programmed feminine roles. I sensed that their struggle against sexual roles was my struggle, but I didn't know where I fit in. I soon figured it out.

In June, the same month as the SDS split, an event occurred that was to be far more significant: The Stonewall Rebellion. Courageous drag queens in New York resisted a police raid for the first time and fought back. It was a catalytic event, like Rosa Parks' refusal to sit in the back of the bus which touched off a decade of black civil rights protests. Twenty years of quiet organizing by the homophile movement had culminated in the explosion called gay liberation. To learn about Christopher Street — four months later, through a *Newsweek* article slyly titled "Police and the Third Sex" — was, finally, the knowledge I needed. So, too, were the early gay liberation articles syndicated by the underground press and printed in Cambridge's *Broadside/Free Press*.

My long struggles with the draft and with my sexuality finally resolved themselves in late 1969. I came out two weeks after I had begun my alternative service. During that final period, preoccupation with homosexuality had become a

choices. We didn't all like each other. We didn't even all respect each other. The divisions became more and more important — between socialist feminist and radical feminist, lesbian and heterosexual, separatist and non-separatist.

I felt a politic of hate come into the movement. I want to think more about where that politic comes from. Disappointment in our early visions of sisterhood is only a partial answer.

I know it's not easy to feel good about yourself in this society. Almost all of us live feeling powerless in one way or another — women, blacks, gay people, disabled people, Native Americans, ethnic minorities — the list goes on and on.

We suffer from real oppression and injustice. But recognizing this oppression doesn't end it. We still don't have complete power and control over our lives. And we still don't have the final answer on how to get it.

There is no clear path to a totally liberated and free society. I try to do the political work that feels good to me and change to make sense, but I don't know what is really going to change the world.

An analysis that says women are good and men are bad answers a lot of questions for some women. It leads to a simple and clear strategy. In the short run, spend as much time as possible just with women. In the long run, get rid of men. It's a way to try to escape from a morass of pain and uncertainty, particularly if you don't worry about racial oppression or ethnic oppression or the brother you still really love.

However, some women have also gained a lot of personal power and prestige in the movement by putting themselves in the vanguard of man-hating politics.

For years I've seen the movement pushed and split by ever more correct lines — it's most correct to be a lesbian, it's most correct to be a separatist, it's most correct to be an extremely

militant lesbian separatist.

The line is made more powerful by the ways it speaks to our real oppression. We do live in a sexist society. Most of us have been hurt, insulted and abused by men. It's easy to hate them, or to feel guilty if there is one (or two or three) individual men that we find we like very much.

It's also been easy to feel scared and intimidated by women who have been so sure of their rightness and so critical of those who don't agree.

It's especially easy to feel intimidated because it has not just been men who have been attacked. Sisterhood was long ago left behind as "woman-hating" also became popular in the movement. Heterosexual women, women with boy children, women with a transsexual history, women working politically with men, women with close male friends, women who supported these women, have all at times been viciously attacked and abused.

These attacks have not only been tolerated in the community, but also spread and encouraged by some feminist books, papers and culture. And they result inevitably in the San Francisco concert where women would both yell and throw things at Linda Tillery and her musicians and would slap another woman in the face.

Several letters in *Plexus* spoke of the racism of the disruptors — white women who were yelling at and passing judgement on black performers. Their arguments were powerful. In attacking Tillery and Obiedo, the women were denying the racial oppression experienced by black people and disregarding any choices based on racial unity. The implicit demand was that Tillery accept only the need to struggle against men as her politics. That certainly is racism.

Some women also wondered if the same thing would have happened to white women musicians, say Holly Near or Meg

Christian. I think, yes, it would have happened to white women. Indeed, it has happened to white women.

I'll say again, women have repeatedly attacked other women in the movement. A small group of women have crossed the line from oppressed to oppressor. They have gained power at others' expense.

We can look back in history — look around today — and see other examples of movements perverted by a leadership more into power than the principle of treating each other with decency and dignity. A movement will not lead to real change and a good society if it does not begin with a basic kindness and humanity towards others.

Not that the women who disrupted the concert and the women who share their politics are exactly the leadership of the feminist movement. But they occupy a strong and influential place. And they treat many other women horribly. And they have been allowed to spread their politic in a seldom-criticized manner.

In many ways, the easiest thing for white women to say is that the attack on Tillery was racist. In that way we can distance the event and not accept it as a manifestation of an ideology and a way of acting that has become woven in the feminist movement.

Racism contributed to the disruption, but it was not the whole story. That story is found in the history of our movement. Silence has only allowed attacks to flourish.

I long for the day when I can again feel unambivalently wonderful about being part of the women's movement. But that day won't come until there are real changes in the movement. We must become a movement in which there is a commitment to making this a place where we all feel safe and respected — where there is room for all of our choices — where we again learn how to be kind to each other.

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relentless obsession, and I found references to the subject and perceived advances from other men, seemingly, everywhere. Deliverance from uncertainty and paranoia came at a Joni Mitchell concert early in December, on my birthday. Unfortunately, the experience was not in the least romantic: it spoiled the concert, but when I walked out of Symphony Hall I was much more certain about who I was than I had been a couple of hours before.

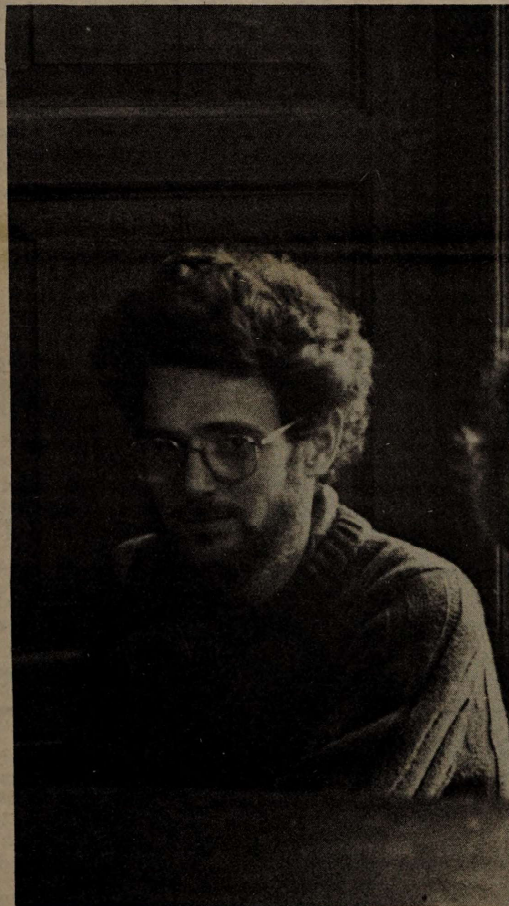
The best known gay bar in Boston at that time was probably the Punchbowl, across Columbus Avenue from the Statler Hilton. I lived just on the other side of the Turnpike in the months before I came out, and I walked by the Punchbowl every day. But the night I summed up the nerve to go in I discovered it had closed the week before. It was soon leveled or a parking lot beside the University of Massachusetts, where I was to go to school four years later. Instead, I found Sporters after searching through Bay Village and the Combat Zone. I had thought that homosexuals were all years older than I, that they had affected mannerisms but all my ridiculous but real fears evaporated when I found the drab facade with the small, dimly-lit sign over the door. I walked in to find a group of human beings fully as diverse as any I had ever encountered.

I was drunk with this exposure to gay energy, and I went to Sporters nearly every night for a month. But I quickly tired of standing around for hours in a cramped, smoky room, staring at other men and trying in my shyness to start a conversation with a stranger without feeling like a fool. I soon tired of the game. In January, 1970, an ad in *Boston After Dark* for people interested in starting a Student Homophile League got me in touch with Stan Tillotson.

Boston's visible gay community was nowhere near as large or as organized as it is today. There were half as many bars, and only three organizations. There were no baths or newspapers. Lundeen's Turkish Baths, located in the alley behind the Trailways terminal, had been forced to close several years before, rumor had it, because the owner had balked at an increase in the price of the protection payoff to the police. The *Los Angeles Advocate* — then very different from what it is now — was the only major gay paper around, soon to be followed by *Gay*, from New York. Both were often tacky and sexist, but *Gay* was, by far, grosser. (It was published by the publishers of *Screw*.) The *Advocate* had begun two years before as a mimeographed organizational newsletter.

The Homophile Union of Boston (HUB), the city's first established gay organization, started in January, 1969, in Frank Morgan's Dorchester living room. (I always admired Frank for having the guts to come out in the community where he had grown up.) By the end of the year there were also the Boston University Homophile Club, which soon expanded to become the area-wide Student Homophile League (SHL) and a chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB). Appropriately, this Puritan-Catholic city that was notorious for banning books until a generation ago, had little history of homophile organization. Attempts to form a local Mattachine Society in the 1950s had floundered because of the abrasive personality of Prescott Townsend, its eccentric Yankee Brahmin founder.

I was frightened the first time I walked into an SHL organizational meeting, a dozen people in a conference room in the BU Student Union. I quickly discovered I had nothing to fear; an exciting chapter of my life was opening up before me, and there was no turning back. SHL was soon holding socials at BU every week, providing (or trying to provide) a relaxed and open alternative to the dark, secretive places where we had been accustomed to meet. At the same time HUB had outgrown meeting in people's houses. It opened an office in Field's Corner (of all places) and also began to hold meetings in the basement of St. John the Evangelist on Beacon Hill. (SHL later met there, too, but years later St. John had an



John Kyper

evident change of heart and evicted a gay group — Older and Other-Gays, I think.) Links were established between HUB and SHL — both overwhelmingly male — and DOB, and we were able to work on common projects and maintain contact. This was our "movement"!

At first these groups fulfilled principally service and social functions in a city where little but the bars and the cruising areas had ever existed before. Political activism was an afterthought for most of the people involved in these early efforts, and consisted of an appearance before a legislative committee to argue for reform of the state's (still) Draconian sex laws. No one bothered to oppose us, but we were scarcely noticed.

For many of us in SHL, such modest actions were not enough. Changing the law, however admirable, could not be viewed as an end in itself, because the law was more a consequence than a cause of our oppression. Thus, a dozen of us started the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) in March, not as a splinter of the older, New York, organization but, instead, as a political extension of it. We desired to emulate all of the enviable things that New York's GLF was doing, and even the negative reactions of conservative gays — one HUB member expressed his belief that GLF members weren't really gay but

had been sent, presumably by the Communists, to infiltrate the gay community — fueled our enthusiasm.

GLF-NY had evolved out of the Yippies, and the counter-cultural energy was contagious — especially when I visited New York that spring. Stonewall was a fresh memory, a common reference point. GLF was doing all sorts of exciting things that we could only dream about: demonstrating, publishing a tabloid — *Come Out*, planning a community center. While I was there I attended a GLF dance held at Alternate U near Union Square.

The first action of Boston's GLF was to march as a contingent in the April Moratorium on Boston Common. At its height there were about 100 of us, including a number of feminist supporters. Our signs — "Bring the Boys Home/Gay Liberation Front" — scandalized many people, including some gays. I continued to hear about it for several years thereafter. Unfortunately, our contingent was only one bright spot amid a lot of gloom: The Moratorium lacked the hope of its October counterpart six months before. This time frustration and anger over Nixon's deviousness on the war exploded into a furious riot in which people trashed Harvard Square. I could not, even in my nonviolence, disown my rage, which others shared and were expressing that night — a position for which I was savagely attacked when I expressed it to some fellow members of an antiwar group, who were more concerned with keeping the protest Respectable. The "White Night" riot in San Francisco brought back to me many memories of this earlier riot.

I had never witnessed same-sex dancing in Boston outside the murky confines of The Other Side. At the end of April GLF pulled off the first open gay dance, which was a tremendous success. It was held in an abandoned Harvard lecture hall that had been taken over by a group of street people and called Free U. (They were burned out shortly afterward, and the building was immediately demolished for the Harvard Science Center.) We held another dance Memorial Day weekend at the Charles Street Meetinghouse. Both times the band insisted upon playing "Under My Thumb," the Rolling Stones' paean to male supremacy, infuriating the women and presaging the division of GLF.

Although dancing between members of the same sex is illegal in Boston, the police did not bother us at the Meetinghouse dance. Many of the neighbors were outraged, however, including a closeted couple next door and some of the most powerful people in the city. That Charles Street was the gayest street in town and Boston Common was infested with hippie freaks was insult enough to their sensibilities. And so pressure from the mayor's office (yes, Kevin White) forced Rev. Randy Gibson who ran the Meetinghouse to cancel a dance scheduled for mid-June.

Our plans for a Gay Pride dance were also stymied. The coordinating committee of the local homophile organizations had proclaimed June 28th as a gay liberation weekend. We wanted a dance — somewhere — the highlight of the weekend's activities. We approached all of the area colleges and churches that we thought might be sympathetic. Nothing. Some of the excuses we received were truly grotesque: U. Mass. decided we were "inappropriate" for its neighborhood. (At the time the entire Boston campus was located in Park Square, then even more than now the center of the city's gay life.) The MIT administration handed the matter over to a staff psychiatrist, who declared that their poor, innocent students would be too threatened by our dance! The MIT student association was so insulted by this logic that it gave GLF \$600. However, it was not until the end of the summer that we were finally able to have our own dance, at BU.

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Several alternatives for the dance were discussed at GLF. We talked with varying degrees of seriousness about seizing a building at UMass or liberating a park. We discouraged a couple of militants who simply wanted a confrontation. Finally we decided to have a gay-in Sunday afternoon at the weekly Cambridge Common rock concert, a meeting place for area freaks.

We also planned some seminars for Saturday afternoon, "Dialogue with a Straight World." How much of a dialogue we got I'm not sure. Despite extensive publicity, I found the turnout somewhat disappointing: Our best session had about 50 people. Maybe two dozen of us came to the gay-in. We had a Gay Liberation banner and passed out balloons with the wording, "Gay is love" printed on them. We held hands, danced and occasionally freaked out the tourists in passing Gray Lines buses, who stared at us like they thought the whole Common scene a zoo. Nothing like *that* in Sioux City!

A week later HUB sponsored an attempted July 4th march through Provincetown, which was stymied by the town's refusal to grant a permit. It ended in a peaceful standoff between demonstrators and police. The town subsequently reneged and granted us a permit for a Labor Day march down Commercial Street to the Town Field. There were a couple hundred of us — my first time in Provincetown — including a sizable contingent from New York's Gay Activists Alliance.

The rest of the summer was fairly uneventful, save for our finally finding the space for a dance, in August, at BU. GLF was slowly drifting apart. As we all worked out of SHL, GLF was never able to achieve a separate identity and remained in the shadow of the other groups. We held desultory meetings throughout the summer at MIT, hampered by heavy turnover. In September I came back after a week's vacation to discover the group no longer existed: The women had walked out, charging that the meetings were male-dominated. What was left reconstituted itself as Gay Male Liberation (GML).

Relating to the community and to the larger society proved a difficult task. Here the women were evidently more successful than the men. Through the fall and winter GML was preoccupied with its own problems and was scarcely able to relate to anyone outside of itself. The group's attempts at self-definition became an obsession, and disagreement among members was discouraged by the more-radical-than-thou syndrome characteristic of the male power game throughout the New Left as a whole. Many of us who had been connected with GLF were drifting away because we could no longer identify with the group.

The establishment and collapse of a community center, early in 1971, was the "great leap forward" that nearly destroyed GML. A large house was rented in Cambridge with the gift from MIT. The center was meant as a social and political focus for gay males, a place in which individuals could interact freely. Noble motives to be sure. But the members of GML could not overcome the ghetto mentality that encourages homosexuals to despise themselves and each other. That the community center broke up in February, only a couple of months after it had been formed, should have been no surprise.

The community center collective had seemed to be cursed from the beginning. One of its members absconded after being entrusted with several hundred dollars. (A

disheartening echo of the everyday oppression by blackmailers and other ripoff artists.) Laxity with finances was typical of the collective and it quickly amassed a deficit of \$800. But money only symbolized the deeper problems of living together. The prevalence of animosity among members prevented the community center from contributing to its community (which had given it some support, but not enough) and proved that gays, no matter how liberated they thought they were, had yet to learn how to trust one another.

Certainly GML was not alone; the problem of trust was manifest throughout the gay movement. Relations between the organizations were usually tenuous, and misunderstandings were commonplace. At times the militants and their more conventional counterparts in HUB and DOB were barely on speaking terms. The women were often angered by male dominance of common projects and refused to cooperate when they felt (usually justifiably) that their wishes were being ignored. Thus planning for a Gay Solidarity Day disintegrated when it became obvious that there was precious little solidarity to celebrate. The depth of the misunderstanding became painfully evident at an abortive planning meeting that the women had boycotted.

At first the prospects for a Gay Pride Week hardly seemed any more promising. But some of our early efforts had begun to pay off. Not only were the different groups finally able to cooperate, but also, many more people were now willing to participate in a public program. Our visibility had grown immeasurably following the GML picket, in February, of Ken's restaurant in Copley Square, after the management had ejected two men for kissing. The *Boston Globe* discovered the gay movement, using a picture of the picketing to illustrate the story.

Gay Pride Week 1971 was a celebration of what had been accomplished and an attempt to reach more people. We sponsored a successful week of seminars, culminating in a sidewalk march of 200 people through downtown Boston. We presented demands at four institutions symbolic of our oppression: Jacques bar, the police headquarters, the State House and St. Paul's Cathedral. While we were rallying on the steps of the Common, those ubiquitous Gray Line buses again appeared. Elaine Noble, who was speaking, had us turn our signs around to face the tourists. We then headed over by the Parkman Bandstand for a poetry reading, a "book dumping" of antihomosexual writings, and a "closet smashing" ceremony. That night we held our first dance at the Meetinghouse since we had been stopped the year before. We were not bothered by the mayor or the police.

Not all of the omens of this first Gay Pride Week were pleasant, however. With our modest success we discovered we could be exploited by all sorts of newfound "friends." The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which until recently had expelled gays from its membership, suddenly discovered us as a promising new source of recruits. The masculine hierarchy of the Party is incapable of seeing new movements in any other way, as the feminists had already discovered. At a Gay Pride planning meeting three SWP representatives assured us, curiously, that the Party had *many* gay members. (Where had they been all this time? Had they all come out *en masse*?) Not a word of acknowledgement or apology for its past practices, just the expectation that we should welcome their "support" with open arms.

Our misgivings were confirmed when SWP presented its own

"Forum on Gay Liberation," falsely implying it was a part of the Week's activities and promising representatives of the local gay movement — who proved to be a Party member who had attended one SHL meeting — and a political candidate imported from New York. Evidently we ourselves couldn't be trusted to present ideas on gay liberation to the Party's satisfaction. By the time the SWP members represented themselves to the media as spokespeople for our organizations, we had had enough. A Gay Pride Week symposium at Old West Church turned into an ugly confrontation, after SWP tried to place its pamphlets on the gay liberation table. The same scene, we soon learned, was playing itself out in other cities, like New York and San Francisco.

Even heavier was the realization that an associate might be a police agent. (He probably wasn't.) Recently purloined FBI documents had spoken of creating the sense "that there is an FBI agent in every mailbox." One GML member had spent a short term in jail after refusing to testify before a grand jury "fishing expedition" against the Mayday Collective. Repression was becoming an omnipresent reality.

After a year and a half I was rapidly burning out. Gay liberation in Boston felt like it had come to a standstill; more seemed to be happening in smaller places like Rochester and Minneapolis. The Kalos Society of Hartford was publishing a monthly newspaper, the *Gryphon*. I despaired of ever getting together a monthly gay paper in Boston. Aside from literary endeavors like the *HUB Quarterly*, DOB's *FOCUS* and GML's *Fag Rag*; Boston had seen only a short-lived SHL weekly that lasted 10 issues and never outgrew the mimeograph machine. I had wearied, too, of the factionalism I was witnessing in SHL and in HUB, and I quietly dropped out of both organizations. When a GLF-founded study group finally collapsed that fall I realized that I no longer belonged to any gay groups. A stage of my life had ended.

Unlike many others at the time, I was not embittered. Instead, I was grateful for the valuable lessons I had learned through gay liberation. Political revolt was the therapy that had changed my life. If the movement was ever to amount to anything in Boston, I realized, other people would pick up the ball. Too, I never believed in gay provincialism and felt renewed urgency to oppose the continuing war in Indochina. I had been particularly inspired by the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Other people were coming to the same conclusions about the deadly relationship between Manhood and violence. I realized after some of the gave their testimony at a Winter Soldier Investigation in Vermont. In November my CO alternative service expired, and I became an active camp-follower of the VVAW for the next six months.

In those days I had visions that the VVAW might become the cutting edge of a male liberation movement, a necessary counterpart to the work of feminists and gays. Perhaps I was too optimistic, but I did meet many veterans who were making the connections in their own lives. (Eventually this organization, too, burned itself out, and its last remnants were finally gobbled up by a sect of Maoist moonies.) At the same time I realized I had never really left the gay liberation movement, and I became involved with a group just getting started at the University of Vermont. By the summer of 1973 I was more deeply involved in the movement in Boston than I had ever been before.

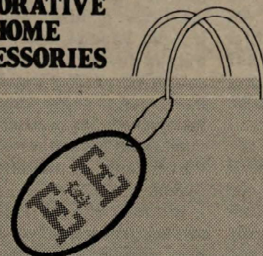
The connections I have never forgotten, even as some parts of the gay liberation movement evolved towards a watered-down focus upon gay rights. The connections between war resistance and gay liberation is certainly no less critical to me now than it has ever been. Appeals to Respectability, however enticing, are not going to save us at a time when the government's nuclear machismo is prepared to get us into a war in an

attempt to stave off a depression. We cannot separate our fate from the rest of humankind. In the hard years ahead, our concern with enacting a few laws, like our endless squabbling, is going to become academic. Like all people of good will, we are going to be thrown back upon our resources and our vision in a desperate attempt to prevent humanity from destroying itself.

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