

# Just news

## San Francisco's "White Night" remembered

*A Twinkie and police car roast highlighted the well-organized and imaginative evening*

BY BILL STRUBBE

With chants of "Fags in drag, dykes from hell, we still say it's right to rebel," an exuberant crowd of 400 gays and lesbians blocked traffic at Castro and 18th Street in a San Francisco commemoration of the "White Night" riots.

Ten years ago, on May 21, 1979, a seven woman, five man jury found Dan White guilty of two counts of voluntary manslaughter — instead of murder — in the killing of gay Supervisor Harvey Milk and San Francisco Mayor George Moscone. White was sentenced to only seven years in prison. Within several hours of the verdict, a crowd of 5,000 gays and lesbians gathered in front of the City Hall. The windows of the building were shattered by the enraged crowd. Thirteen police cars exploded into flames and turned Civic Center Plaza into a battlefield.

Later that same evening, dozens of police rampaged through the Castro district in retaliation, storming into the Elephant Walk bar and beating patrons and employees, shattering the window and furniture. Over 100 gays and lesbians and 60 police were hospitalized, 19 demonstrators arrested, and close to \$1,000,000 in damages incurred.

The fury in the aftermath of Dan White's lenient verdict was absent from the anniversary march, but anger over continued discrimination against gays and lesbians and people with AIDS was strongly voiced, tempered with a heavy dose of camp and humor. The gay and lesbian organizers had hoped to glorify not the violence of the "White Night," but the pride, militance and anger which should confront oppression.

Barbara Maggiani, San Francisco Sentinel staff photographer and veteran of the "White Night" said, "It was an important, historic event equal to Stonewall, not only for San Francisco's gay community, but for the whole country."

Gloria Mundi, attired in pink petticoat, fake leopard fur coat and running shoes, was at the riots ten years ago. "I'm here tonight because it's important to remember and to remind ourselves that the problems that existed then still exist now." He recalled of that night, "A TV news brief flashed on the screen showing the riots at the City Hall. I raced down there to join in. Every time the

sound of glass was heard, a cheer went up." Flouncing his petticoat, Gloria said, "Well, I was in much butchier drag back then — leather — but this is easier to run in."

At the anniversary rally, a disco re-enactment of the highlights of the events of 10 years ago was staged in front of the Elephant Walk. A Dianne Feinstein (then mayor of the City) fascimile narrated the unfolding events while a chorus line of men in drag, sporting twinkie masks, danced to "It's a Shame" in remembrance of the ludicrous "Twinkie" defense used by Dan White's lawyers to explain his murderous behavior. Lines of "Burnin', burnin'..." from the BeeGee's "Disco Fever" alluded to the 13 police cars torched. The chorus line was clubbed by a policeman to the beat of "Macho Man." At the finale the enthusiastic crowd erupted into dancing in the street with "We Are Family." Stickers reading "Elephants Never Forget" were plastered over the front of the bar.

David Matthias, a gay man with AIDS, remembered, "When I came out of work from the telephone company in the financial district, I heard the news. I was furious. Wearing my Brooks Brothers suit and Gucci shoes, I got on the Muni and went to the City Hall. We rocked the police cars and the gas sloshed out. With my gold, Dunhill cigarette lighter I helped set fire to the police cars. Now, I'm not a violent person, but I had never been so angry in my life. I still am."

Ruth Mahoney, sporting a 10-year-old T-shirt discovered in the back of her closet depicting a row of cop cars ablaze with "Stonewall 1969, San Francisco 1979" written underneath, recalled the "White Night" riots. "Lots of police cars cruised up and down the Castro. Then a Muni bus stopped at 18th and suddenly a bunch of cops, who had been hiding on the floor, stood up and poured out into the street. They kept charging into the crowds and smashing people. I was chased up the hill to 20th Street where I could hear the screaming and yelling as they crashed into the Elephant Walk."

The anniversary crowd moved up the familiar route from the Castro to City Hall along Market Street, escorted by dozens of police in full riot gear. Several tense moments transpired when police, using their motorcycles, tried to block the demonstrators from turning down Hayes Street. The intended route of the march (passing by the

Fox Plaza where a man with AIDS jumped to his death in March, Carl's Junior where a homeless person with AIDS recently died on the street, the Army recruitment center and the AIDS vigil in front of the Federal Building) was disrupted by the police. To avoid a confrontation, the demonstrators proceeded directly to the Civic Center.

At City Hall, 50 police in riot gear cordoned off the steps. At a nearby table, Bread Not Bombs offered food to those who were hungry. A mock version of a TV game show — "The Price is High" — played on the street. Bewildered contestants tried to comprehend the ins and outs of FDA AIDS drug approval policies, seeing who could come closest to guessing the exorbitant cost of AZT, while the contestants went blind or died from lack of treatment.

A Twinkie and police car roast highlighted

the well-organized, imaginative evening. A large barrel was turned into a bonfire, while cutouts of police cars were paraded around and tossed into the flames. Hundreds of Twinkies passed through the crowd and were stomped on the asphalt or roasted over the fire. Most of the cream-filled pastries were used as symbolic projectiles, harmlessly heaved at the unruffled police officers lining the City Hall steps. There were no arrests.

Waiyde Palmer, another participant in the "White Night" riots, summed up the commemorative march: "In 10 years, we haven't seen enough change when it comes to legislation concerning gays and lesbians. There is an increase in hate crimes, police violence, drug companies living off of our deaths. Ten years ago we rose up in anger at the injustice. Tonight we rise up peacefully to honor our past and those who have gone."

## Lesbian sues to reverse Measure 8

Ballot measure authorizing state managers to fire gay or lesbian state workers was challenged as unconstitutional in a lawsuit filed on June 8 in the Oregon Court of Appeals.

The suit asks the court to rule that Ballot Measure 8, which was approved by Oregon voters in the November 1988 elections, is invalid, and that contrary administrative rules of the Board of Higher Education are valid. The Board's rules, enacted prior to the passage of Ballot Measure 8, prohibit discrimination in employment on the basis of sexual orientation.

The lawsuit was filed by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of Harriet P. Merrick, a lesbian supervisor employed by the Oregon Board of Higher Education. The suit alleges that Merrick, due to the inconsistency between Measure 8 and the Board's rules, "is required by law to carry out and enforce two contradictory and mutually exclusive legal mandates."

Ballot Measure 8 provides, in part, that "no state official shall forbid the taking of any personnel action against any state employee based on the sexual orientation of such employee." Opponents of Ballot Measure 8 believe that this provision could be interpreted to authorize managers to fire state workers who are gay or lesbian, in violation of state and federal constitutional provisions.

"We are not sure if voters understood the significance of Measure 8," said attorney Charles F. Hinkle, a recognized expert in constitutional law. "If it means what it seems to say, it is plainly unconstitutional, and we

hope to obtain a court ruling to that effect."

The petition filed with the court alleges that Measure 8 violates the privileges and immunities clause of the Oregon constitution and the equal protection clause of the federal constitution. It also alleges that the Measure violates the free speech provision of both state and federal constitutions because it could chill Merrick's freedom to express her opinion about her sexual orientation.

Merrick supervises state employes and student employes for the University of Oregon student loan program. Merrick claims that Measure 8 is inconsistent with the Board's rules. "The rules tell me I can't fire someone from their job simply because of their sexual orientation. But Ballot Measure 8 says that I can do just that," she said.

"Under Ballot Measure 8 a supervisor can fire a person merely because of his or her sexual orientation. In many cases this will mean the end of job security for state employes who, like myself, are outspoken on civil rights issues for gay men and lesbians," she said.

The suit is brought under a provision of state law authorizing the court to determine the validity of state administrative rules.

In late 1987, Gov. Neil Goldschmidt issued an executive order forbidding discrimination against executive department state workers on the basis of sexual orientation. In March 1988, the State Board of Higher Education adopted administrative rules consistent with the governor's order, banning employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The Measure repealed the Governor's order, but not the Board rules.

Copies of the petition are available at ACLU offices in Portland and Eugene.

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