

## Swerdlow provides information on City Nightclub raid

To the Editor:

I would like to thank you for Jack Riley's article (Between The Lines, Feb. 1990) about the December 14th police raid on the City Nightclub. I have not seen such a show of concern and support since former President Ronald Reagan expressed his concern to the nation about the impact of AIDS on the gay community. Then again, what can you expect from an article whose lead line begins "Despite what you may personally think of The City Nightclub and its controversial owner Lanny Swerdlow..." Is it possible that what you think may be related to what you know. Perhaps the following information will help.

The City Nightclub is Portland's only non-alcoholic gay nightclub and as such is frequented by customers under as well as over the legal age to become intoxicated. For some reason this relationship to alcohol has caused the gay community to be somewhat schizophrenic in its treatment of gay youth. One moment there seems to be genuine concern and the next moment, their existence is not even acknowledged. Like it or not, there is a connection between what gay people think about gay youth and what they think about The City Nightclub.

And what about "its controversial owner Lanny Swerdlow." I am curious as to what makes me so controversial. Is it that I work with the youth of our community? Is it because I have been openly gay and working for a variety of gay causes for the past 20 years? Is it because I seek to educate people about the dangers of religious belief and the rationality of atheism? Is it because of the cable TV show NightScene in which as host I extoll the virtues of being gay and the gay community? Is it because I am an unapologetic liberal? Is it because I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Downtown Retail Council and sit on its Public Safety Committee? Is it because I am left-handed? For a magazine such as Just Out to call me controversial is like Mark Hatfield calling Gerry Studds a fag.

It would seem that a major police raid and attempt to close down a gay business in Portland would provoke Just Out's interest a little more than to just excerpt information from an article in the January 18 issue of Willamette Week. There are many facts that

the article didn't cover or have come to light since it was published. I am very easy to reach and it seems that a phone call could have provided you with considerably more information. However, Just Out, one of the major sources of information for Portland's gay community, didn't feel it was worth the effort. Would the same laissez-faire attitude be found if the raid had been directed towards any of the alcoholic nightclubs or towards one of the gay political organizations or perhaps the offices of Just Out?

So what additional information might your readers find interesting about the police raid? First off, considerably more than 10 customers were searched. That was just the number that my fountain worker observed and reported to the Willamette Week reporter. The raid was conducted without a search warrant making the searches of my customers and premises illegal. If the raid was just a simple drug bust, then why did the police bring two representatives from the Fire Marshall's office, five from the Bureau of Buildings and two from the Oregon Liquor Control Commission? The answer is simple — this was not a drug raid, but a personal vendetta carried out by the Portland Police Bureau's Drugs and Vice Division to utilize the newly enacted forfeiture laws to close down a business that served gay youth. Consider these facts:

1. In response to one vice officer's allegation that the police were concerned about the operation of The City Nightclub, I sent several letters (the first one dated August 26, 1989) to Captain Gary Schraeder of the Central Precinct (he is also the Liaison to the Gay Community for the Portland Police) asking him to talk with his officers about their concerns with my business and then for me to meet with him so that I could resolve any complaints. Not one of these letters was answered.

2. The author of the article in Willamette Week, Jim Redden, wrote that "According to Chuck Bollinger, an officer with the Police Bureau's Drugs and Vice Division, the raid was prompted by numerous complaints from parents of young people who frequent the club." However KXL Radio in its attempts to gather information about the raid could not find any of these complaining parents. This same vice officer also claimed that alcohol was served at the club and that there was sexual activity. Anyone familiar with The City Nightclub knows that this is absurd, but what can you expect from a vice officer that uses words such as "bizarre" and "demonic" to describe my club.

3. If you go into almost any nightclub in the city, gay or straight, with 25 or more uniformed and plainclothes police officers and search the customers, you are going to find people with drugs, and probably a lot more than only four (which is the number they found at The City out of a crowd of at least 90).

4. At a meeting of the Central Precinct Citizens Police Advisory Council on February 1, Captain Schraeder explained the reason he never answered my letters. He stated that as my letters requested he checked with his officers to ascertain if they had any concerns about The City Nightclub and NOT ONE OFFICER HAD A SINGLE COMPLAINT. As a consequence, he saw no point in answering any of my letters.

5. At that same meeting Maria Clavadetscher, a crime prevention specialist with Neighbors West-Northwest (in whose boundaries The City Nightclub is located), reported that she had not received even one complaint from anyone about The City Nightclub and it is her job to monitor such problems. This prompted Judy Kitchen, another council member, to comment that for years her neighborhood organization had been trying to get the police to do something about a variety of drug houses and problem businesses in her area. They have never gotten any response and here is a business that neither citizens or uniformed police had any complaints about and it is singled out for a raid described by Willamette Week as "one of the largest in city history."

In conclusion, I think it is obvious that what we are dealing with here are a few paranoid, homophobic vice cops that convinced the entire Portland Police Bureau, Fire Marshall's Commission, Bureau of Buildings and the Oregon Liquor Control Commission to believe their tall tales of horror and Armageddon occurring within the walls of The City Nightclub. This is the most blatant case of gay persecution conducted by a government agency that I can ever recall in the history of Portland and, except for Willamette Week, no one seems to think its worth much notice. After all, it's just a place for young gay people and who cares about gay youth? Well, I do and will continue to do so "despite what you may think about The City Nightclub and its controversial owner..."

Lanny Swerdlow  
Portland

Editor's reply: A simple phone call to Just Out could have alerted us to the raid — telephone lines work both ways.

Cafe Mocha on Sandy Boulevard is also an all-age, non-alcohol, gay and lesbian nightclub, and it has been open for almost a year.

## Obituary

### Renee Michelle Weise

A memorial service to commemorate the life of Renee Michelle Weise was held Friday, January 5, 1990 at Echo Theater. Michelle was killed in an accident on St. Helen's Road December 1st when she apparently fell asleep behind the wheel of her car and ran into the rear of a semi truck.

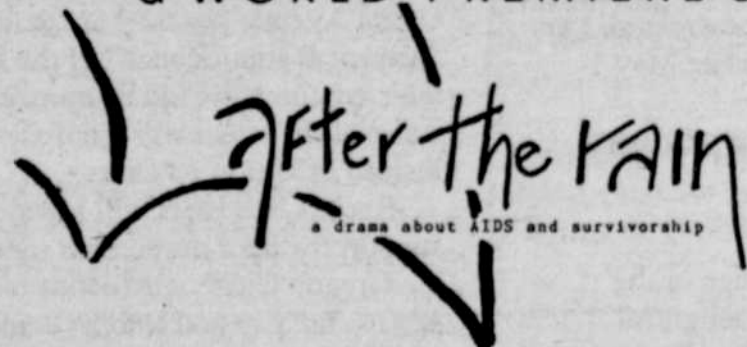
She was born October 29, 1945, in Farragut, to Ina Hermann Weise and John Earnest Weise. After their divorce and her mother's remarriage, Michelle spent much of her childhood living on the Warm Springs Reservation. She was a Vietnam War veteran, and married twice. Three children survive her: a daughter, name unknown, age about 25 years; and two sons, Joshua, 16 and Aaron, 13.

Michelle was what one might call a Universal Seeker. As a young child she was strongly influenced by the Native American spiritual practices, but was also raised Christian and began early to discuss and argue theology with her nonplussed Sunday school teachers. In young adulthood, she converted to Orthodox Judaism, and later pursued Buddhism and metaphysics. At the time of her death, she was a member of Les Dames Verdes, a Dianic Wiccan coven, though the influences of her youth in Native American community had begun to reemerge, and all those close to her recognized the shamanic path she had returned to walk.

After the accident, she regained consciousness briefly and was taken by Life Flight to OHSU, where she died.

No doubt she has already plunged enthusiastically into the next phase of learning, and is already challenging her celestial teachers to the hilt. Behind her, she leaves an enormous empty place in the lives of those who worked with her, lived with her and loved her. Like a giant fir tree suddenly struck down, she has left a lonely place against the sky, a place no one will fill like Michelle.

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