

The celebration of a revolution

via GayWire™

Maybe it was the death of Judy Garland, maybe it was being hassled at two in the morning when someone had had a few too many. Maybe it was the full moon that night, or perhaps it was having been humiliated and sneered at for far too many years. Something snapped that June night 25 years ago on Christopher Street, in Greenwich Village at the Stonewall Inn, and the effects are still being felt today.

Stonewall is now a symbol, an icon, a rallying cry. Full equality is still an ideal and not a reality, but much has improved in 25 years. Millions of us are out and living our lives in a way not possible in 1969.

THE MARCH, THE U.N. AND CENTRAL PARK

For the past few weeks, articles in New York City newspapers were forecasting a variety of dire events; marchers clashing with police on Fifth Avenue; confusion and infighting from the organizers; a plot by the city; re-routing by the mayor and the Roman Catholic Church of any parade so as to bypass St. Patrick's Cathedral; the barring of motorcycle clubs from participation in the march. Instead the day was beautiful, the on-lookers cheered, the marchers beamed, and the police were polite. Hardly the Armageddon that was predicted.

The march began promptly at 11 am and was led by the Gay Activists Alliance. Following the Alliance were six baton twirlers and the 42-piece Lesbian and Gay Big Apple Corps marching band which played everything from "New York, New York" to "Les Miserables" to "It's a Grand Old Flag."

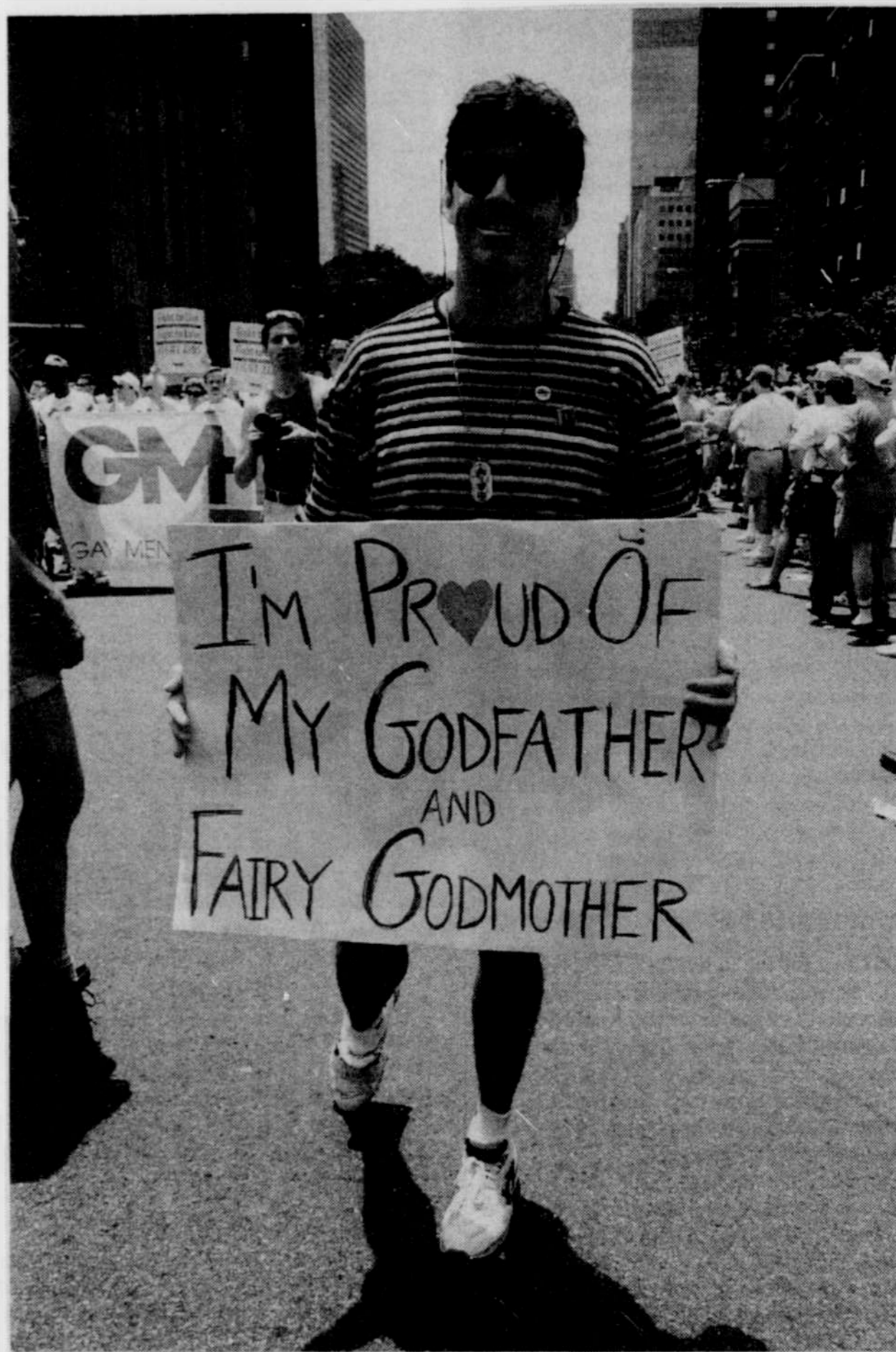
The Rainbow Flag was next. It is the largest flag ever created, stretching 20 city blocks, about one mile. It's 30 feet wide and, as the flag passed by, spectators were encouraged to toss coins onto it. All proceeds went to the AIDS community. The flag was cut up into strips for contributors of \$50 or more, and parts will be donated to gay and lesbian community centers and AIDS organizations.

A 70-year-old woman in a lovely summer dress and wide-brimmed hat was impressed by the procession. She said, "This is the first time I've ever seen a Pride Parade. I think it's wonderful. It's based on freedom. Without freedom there would be no United States."

The day got hotter, and, by 1 pm, the temperature hit 90 degrees. The thousands of free sodas handed out by the Schweppes company were appreciated. The heat eventually began to take its toll. One middle-aged man was overheard to have said, "We're getting too old for this," and his friend replied, "Who told you to stay up until 4 am?"

The International March on the United Nations lasted over four hours and differed from previous New York City Gay Pride marches. The only word that describes the traditional New York City parade is outrageous—lots of men in stiletto heels and garter belts, masses of tough-looking tattooed lesbian bikers, gogo boys dancing on floats, topless women, and a lot of pierced skin. Sunday's march was aimed at Main Street and tried to portray a community less threatening and less challenging.

"I invited a few guests, and we're going to the park. What else do you do with a million people?" This comment was made by one of the lead marchers as we entered Central Park. The crowd slowly made its way to the Great Lawn on the east side of the park, near 81st Street, and was presented with a long list of speakers and entertainers. A few of the



Pride was the sentiment of the day for one of the largest international marches ever

illuminati who appeared were: Harvey Fierstein, Charles Busch, Gregory Hines, Tony Kushner, Liza Minnelli, Cheer Dallas, Ru Paul and Sir Ian McKellen. There were some 70 others.

Many speakers stressed the political agenda that lies ahead for us on the local, federal and global level, in the struggle for human and civil rights. There are still many of us murdered, tortured and victimized by bias-related violence, which in some countries is government sanctioned. Part of the purpose of the International March on the United Nations was a demand for the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights to include "lesbian, gay, bisexual, drag, transgender and people with HIV and AIDS, of all colors, in all countries of the world."

Although there was an underlying seriousness of purpose, the march and Central Park rally had an atmosphere of jubilation and happiness. Hundreds of thousands of people filled the lawn to see the show, party with their friends and make new friends. The numbers may never be known—organizers, police and news media estimate different figures ranging from 500,000 to 1 million.

The thousands that go home to different cities and countries will be bringing with them more than souvenirs, a few phone numbers, and high credit

card bills. Hopefully, the sensory and emotional overload of the last few days will slowly be absorbed into their psyches and give them the strength to deal with and improve their personal situations and to take the community forward.

We gather strength when we know we are not alone. These past few days showed the world there are many of us, we are organized, and we are an economic and political force to be dealt with. It is magical and intoxicating to realize our strength and potential when we work together. As Leslie Feinberg, the well-known transgender activist and author of *Stone Butch Blues*, said, "You can only push people against the wall so far, for so long, before they come out fighting. That's the spirit of Stonewall."

AIDS FUND RAISING: RAISE THE RAINBOW

Where do you display a mile-long flag in Manhattan? The answer is obvious—from 37th to 57th Streets, at the head of the largest pride parade ever in the world.

This Rainbow Flag project, called Raise the Rainbow, is a fund-raising effort of the Stadtlanders Foundation that will benefit people living with AIDS throughout the United States.

Volunteers have been working since January under the direction of Gilbert Baker (the gay Betsy Ross), who created the first Rainbow Flag in San Francisco in 1978.

Karen Jacobi, spokeswoman for the Stadtlanders Foundation, said, "We look forward to the dramatic one-time-only display of Raise the Rainbow as a moving and empowering experience in the ongoing fight against AIDS."

PHOTO BY PATSY LYNCH