

Randolfe H. Wicker

From: "Randolfe H. Wicker" [REDACTED] >
To: "jack nichols" [REDACTED] >
Sent: Tuesday, February 19, 2002 7:47 PM
Attach: Randolfe H. Wicker.vcf
Subject: Sylvia Rivera: In Life and In Death (Edited and finished)

Sylvia Rivera, perhaps the most famous survivor of the 1969 uprising outside New York City's Stonewall Bar, had finally gotten her life in order during the past three years. Always an activist, she had finally achieved sobriety, developed a long term relationship with Julia Murray over the last four years and had gotten a managerial job running a food kitchen feeding the homeless.

This was no small achievement for someone whose mother had tried to take Sylvia with her in a double suicide because she feared Sylvia (whose given name was Rey Rivera Mendoza) would "have a hard life".

At eleven, with only five years of schooling, Sylvia found herself working Times Square and 42nd St. as a transvestite child prostitute. In that environment, she would meet Marsha P. Johnson, another legendary figure, who became her mentor and role model.

During the tumultuous years following 1969, Sylvia would be an active member of GLF and GAA. However, she always considered her efforts with Marsha P. Johnson and others in establishing the first refuge for transgendered youth in East Village as the apex of her activist career.. They called their group "Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries" and their tenement headquarters "S.T.A.R. House" Sylvia Rivera's favorite garment in recent years was a black sweater with a rainbow star knitted into it.

Sylvia lived a life of activism. Wherever and whenever there was an injustice, she would join with those demonstrating about it. When some angry Blacks who were marching to protest the brutalization of Abner Louima started calling NYPD officers "faggots", Sylvia quickly reminded them that a lot of gay people were there supporting their protest The shouts of "faggot cops" ceased..

When the memorial march commemorating Matthew Shepherd took to Fifth Avenue,. The officer in charge reportedly pointed at Sylvia and instructed his underlings "to get that one" because "she is a real troublemaker"

When stopped from entering Central Park attempting to give out memorial badges emblazoned "Clone Diana: One Good Lifetime Deserves Another" the police recognized her immediately and addressed her by name, asking her to calm down so they wouldn't have to arrest her.

Sylvia believed in the cloning of organs, kidneys and livers, but participated in the first demonstration in support of human cloning mainly out of a sense of comradeship and solidarity with me. Sylvia had serious reservations about and even opposed reproductive cloning because she believed it would be something available only to the wealthy.

During the 2000 Millennium Celebration in Rome, Italy, Sylvia Rivera and Julia Murray were treated like royalty. Housed in a castle, Sylvia was given tribute as the founder of the World's Struggle for Transgendered Rights.

She continued high profile activism literally on her deathbed at St. Vincent's Hospital. Hours before she died, Matt Forman(who previously worked for the Empire State Pride Agenda) visited the St. Vincent's Hospital and heard her plea for inclusion of transgendered people in proposed legislation currently being considered by New York State legislators.

On February 7th, Sylvia Rivera, obviously in frail health, had spoken at a rally held outside that group's offices protesting the exclusion of transgendered people from the proposed civil rights legislation.

"Sylvia looked like she really shouldn't have been there." One activist commented after the well-

attended event ended.

It was obvious to those around her that Sylvia's time was running out. In the final weeks, with jaundiced skin, unable to sleep for days on end because of the pain caused by the cancerous tumor in her liver, Sylvia continued to supervise the food distribution to the homeless and the HIV clients at the Metropolitan Community Church's food pantry on West 36th Street in Manhattan. The Subways had become too difficult. She continued to show up for work even though the cab fares to and from "Transy House" in Brooklyn consumed much of her pay. She had lived for several years in a house owned by a transgendered couple that shared their home with other transgendered people.

Sylvia Rivera died shortly after five in the morning on February 19, 2002. At her bedside were her life mate Julia Murray and Rev. Pat Bumgardner of the Metropolitan Community Church. The physician attending Sylvia Rivera in her last hours reportedly cried and described her as "one tough cookie" and "a real fighter".

Realizing the end was near, Sylvia Rivera put her affairs in order. She also confided that she would like to have a burial like the one portrayed in "Imitation of Life" with the urn with her ashes displayed on a horse drawn carriage and accompanied by a brass band.

The fight to get a permit for a horse drawn carriage in Manhattan from the newly elected Republican Mayor, the problem of getting access to the Hudson River waterfront so Sylvia Rivera's ashes could be scattered near where she once lived in a gay homeless encampment and/or near the foot of Christopher Street (technically an illegal act) where she had helped scatter the ashes of her dear friend and Patron Saint, Marsha P. Johnson, was a legendary activist's final challenge left to her legions of admirers and friends.

Randolfe H. Wicker

Please be advised that as of 03.25.02 (March 25, 2002) my new email address will be [REDACTED]

Please update your address book accordingly.