



CHRIS : Gay Prisoner in Bellevue



(Note: Chris Thompson is a black male transvestite who went to Bellevue Hospital for treatment of his asthma. Because he was gay and a transvestite, he was transferred to the psychiatric wing, where he could be "kept under control." Chris has found brutality and ridicule at Bellevue, not medical attention and is now threatened with transfer to a state mental hospital, from which he might never return. STAR's Sylvia Rivera and GAA's Arthur Bell conducted an interview, a part of which is printed here.)

Q: Do you feel that you're being held prisoner here?

A: I feel that I am a prisoner and have been mistreated. They claim they are trying to help me but I don't think they are. I think they are just bull... just playing with me, just because of my homosexuality, wondering whether I want to have an operation, and asking me all these questions which doesn't concern them. They claim they're treating me because of my asthma. They said they thought I may have tuberculosis, so they did a biopsy, and they found it was congestion of the chest. Then they told me they was going to send me home. I asked the doctor three weeks ago if I could have a pass so that I could take care of finding housing, and she said, "No." And I asked why and she said "Because we can't let you out by yourself." She said she was going to ask for an attendant, but then she said she couldn't find no attendant that could go with me.

Q: Do you think they're going to keep you in here perhaps forever?

A: Well, she told me if I can't find a place to stay they would have to transfer me straight to a state hospital. But everyone tells me that here you can file for a lawyer; they can't send you to the state hospital... they have to give me some welfare assistance.

Q: Would you want us to support you if they continue holding you here:

A: Yes, I would want full support.

Q: One of the things we'd like to know is how are the people around here -- the doctors and the nurses and attendants.

A: Well, I only get funny cracks. They say you're still a man and they still are always low-rating me and saying funny little cracks and putting me down and making me feel bad all the time. I had a nurse get very nasty with me. She said, "We've had faggots here before" and she treats me very nasty and snotty and she says, "Don't mess with the hand that feeds you." She's told me that I would never look as good as she looks," so don't get your high horses up." I felt that she felt some jealousy, something against homosexuality and she got very evil with me. When I came into the admitting office, I told the doctor I had congestion and asthma. Because of me wanting to be a woman so much, he asked me did I ever have a fear of cutting my

penis off. I didn't tell him one way or the other, but on my record they have it down that I have a fear of cutting my penis off, to become a woman. I want to become a woman that bad, so they asked me these questions -- do I still have a fear of taking a razor and cutting my penis off and I told them no, and if I did decide to have a sex change I would go through the legal procedures and go to the proper physicians and have it done.

Q: Do you feel that you're being treated worse than the other patients?

A: Yes I feel that I'm treated much more worse because of my femme tendencies and I'm always criticized about my hair or I'm always criticized about my face or something like that. My doctor told me that as long as my make-up wasn't too noticeable that I could wear it but then the attendant said that the doctor said that I couldn't wear it ...so it's just like they're bull... they're saying this and saying that.

Q: What do you do in your spare time here?

A: I don't do anything. I have usually been sick so I just stay in the bed and they get very angry. I go to all the group therapy they have here, drama therapy, and all that.

Q: Are they trying to make you straight? Did they get into that?

A: They haven't been really trying to change me, but they make me feel bad by ridiculing me.

Q: Not the doctors, the other patients, right?

A: No, I have no problems with the patients. The patients accept me quite highly. It's the staff that really bugs me.

Q: Is there anything else that you can tell us about your stay here that might be interesting?

A: Well, as I told my doctor, I wasn't here to tempt any patients. I was only here to get medical help. She says that they can't transfer me. One reason is 'cause I'm homosexual, and another is that they don't transfer psychiatric patients. Also, they made me sleep in the hall because they were afraid that the males may get interested in me.

Q: Chris, just looking at you now, it doesn't look as if you're wearing any make-up at all, and you certainly can pass for a straight. What I don't understand is why they're so down on you. The only thing I notice is that you have your hair a little longer than the average.

A: It's just the fact that if I look any kind of way effeminate, they get up tight about it. I had some jeweled eyelashes which were given to me by a patient here, and they took them from me. They took my hair rollers away, they locked up all my female attire, they said I can't have it until I leave the hospital. I wanted to set my hair for an Afro; they wouldn't let me set it because they said it attracts the male attention, the males would get uptight.

Q: They're afraid of having anybody go to bed with you while you're here.

A: I think they fear that I will have a homosexual affair here if I look too effeminate.

Q: And that's worse to them than the rats in the hallways?

A: Well, I think there's rats on the staff! And they say when I blow my top and tell them off that I am crazy, but I am only standing up for my rights...because I am human like anyone else.

Q: Do you have any plans for when you get out of here?

A: Yes, I would like to go back to school and finish college and become a dance therapist, an activity therapist. That's what I want to be.

Q: Were you a dancer before?

A: Yes, I was.

Q: Are you interested in the STAR (Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries) movement?

HAPPY HOMOS HIT HAR PERS

As a part of the "sexual revolution" major magazines can now publish articles about homosexuality. But these articles are inevitably written by straights and they are equally anti-gay, no matter what their pretenses. Until recently, they got away with it.

Gay Activists Alliance confronted Harper's after their September issue contained such an article. They informed the magazine that "Homo/Hetero: The Struggle for Sexual Identity" was offensive to gay people and said that they felt Harper's was under a moral obligation to give equal space to an article favorable to us. Three articles were submitted and all were rejected. Nor would the magazine commission their own.

Having exhausted all indirect channels, GAA decided to confront Harper's. Tuesday, 50 people arrived early in the morning. Only one receptionist was there at the time and they had no trouble in occupying all of the executive offices. They brought a coffee machine, donuts, and leaflets. Their purposes were to educate the Harper's staff by showing them "real" homosexuals, not the figments of their repressed minds, and to give notice to all the media that slander of homosexuals would not be accepted without trouble.

GAA leafleted in the building and on the street. They rapped with the employees, including heated exchanges with the woman who commissioned the article in question and the art director who chose the oppressive pictures which went along. They sang gay liberation songs, played guitars, and generally had "a beautiful time."

While Harper's response was only that they would "actively consider finding" an article favorable to gay people, GAA left at 4:00. They left behind them, however, one magazine which knew what hit them and would hesitate before printing trash about gay people in the future.

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GAY LIBERATION MEETS THE COMMUNIST PARTY

Revolutionary Gays have on several occasions in the past several weeks confronted the Communist Party, U.S.A., about their anti-gay beliefs. Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries, Third World Gay Revolution, and Gay Liberation Front have been active in support of Angela Davis, a CP member, busted for revolutionary activity in California, but the "party" hasn't wanted our support. We can march beside them as long as we do not carry our own banners or camp it up too much. Three times, GLF or STAR people have been thrown off the picket lines. So far, we haven't had the numbers to physically resist, but we hope to at the next demo, Nov. 20.

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A: I'm interested in anything that has anything to do with gay activities. I'm all for it all, and I want to fight for it. I'm willing to go all the way as far as I can go -- if it means even my life I'll do it.

Q: What do you feel about the sort of thing that Sylvia is into now. (Sylvia is an officer of STAR. -- ed.)

A: I think it's beautiful. I think that if we can help our people -- when I say our people I mean gay people -- I think I'm all for it.

Q: Have you had any thoughts about how you can help gay people, what you might be able to do once you're out of here?

A: If I can obtain a job and work, if it's for any gay person, I don't care who it is, I would give fully. I'm for all gay people, that's my feelings, this is coming straight from my heart. And I mean it.