

## NOTES FROM MARTIN DUBERMAN INTERVIEW WITH SYLVIA RIVERA

### Tape 02887 NYPL Martin Duberman Collection Interview 10/12/90

Martin Duberman "saw her (Marsha) a few weeks ago, 20/20 is a new place, they started at about 5 in the afternoon which is perfect for me and Marsha was there looking goooooood, and I went up to her and said hello and she seemed fine and then I saw her again in the parade and a again she looked good, she looked clear eyed and yet but everybody says that she's not good."

SR "She tends to lose to lose ? Mart, you know it's just a shame you know I saw her what was it during the aids walkathon, I participated in that and of course we marched together in the march.

MD "So you don't keep up with er..."

SR "We you know she knows my number and I always felt that if she could have a place to stay anytime because Marsha was very good to all of us, you know, you start her off on the same foot, actually Marsha was the first person I met (laughs) that I really, really knew from 42<sup>nd</sup> street I mean to this day I say she was there and she ? and light(?) and I meant that we're not that much older than each other but she was always there we even worked together ? Child's Restaurant she was a waiter and I was working in the office.

MD " Can we start way back can you tell me what it was like growing up I know you lost your parents early....

SR "My moms committed suicide when I was three years old. (Talks about a cat that she gave "him" when we first started going together). She had already divorced my father. (Mentions stepfather) and he was into dealing drugs and whatnot (stepfather). Bathroom was in the kitchen he used to cut up his coke and roll his joints in the kitchen and whatnot and I remember my mother getting very angry at her one time and threatening to leave her because of the simple fact of what he was doing and he got very angry at her and threatened to kill her me and my baby sister, my bs was..... few months old that was his daughter, so I guess the only part... today I call it a cop out but today I call it a cop out but I guess it really wasn't a cop out because the only way she could get away from that type of life because she wasn't into drugs at all... to kill herself, uh, and er, poison that you very rarely see now, it's call ? rat poison (continues.)

The last thing I remember about her was her puking up and getting sick all over the place and me they were just rushing me off to pump off my stomach. That's the last time I saw her alive. But I remember she lingered for two days because I know my grandmother had me and we would go up to the hospital and I would have to sit in the car. The next thing was the funeral and whatnot. My mother was only 22 years old when she passed on. I was three (SR says she has a beautiful portrait?). It was a trauma you know seeing your moms laid out like that you figure she's sleeping I don't think that I really realized it until my grandmother tried to throw herself into the whole where they were lowing her in the cemetery I didn't really understand that she was really dead I didn't understand that she was really dead... After that my grandmother took care of me.

MD "What happened to your stepfather?"

SR "He went on about his business."

“What I did try to do is try to kill myself.... I just took a whole bunch of medication (gmother’s) and told Sarah but she didn’t believe me. <<Sylvia drank a beer and it brought it on, they took her to Bellevue...>>

SR “ And then I found the Village because there was this guy that was up there his name was Danny, we used to call him Beatle, because he had the Beatle haircut, when you live in the Village you know what’s going on... I bumped into queens, real fucking queens and I didn’t want to go home or back to the hospital. A month or two later I started hustling, they sent me back to Central Islip and I was there for a while (my grandmother sent me back to Bellevue, she didn’t think I was well.)

<<Ran away from CI with a guy she thought she was in love with but they broke up when they got out.>>

<<Gary, the lover was about 6 or 7 years older than SR, they were both hustlers.>>

Grandmother always denied mother’s suicide. Sylvia confronted her. Had pictures of her in her coffin. Sylvia burned them.

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“My sister was adopted I think... My grandmother finally tracked her down.. she was living with the family that adopted her...”

<<Sylvia says she hasn’t seen her sister in all these years.>>

SR “The only family I have is bb?, Marsha, Bob Kohler, that’s the only family that I have, I have no real relatives.”

MD “Did your grandmother die a long time ago.”

SR “Yeah, she died about 20 years ago.”

MD “And Sarah”.

SR “Sarah’s alive but I don’t even bother to keep in touch anymore, I don’t know why, it’s just that, well I know why because I wasn’t there when my grandmother died I wasn’t there for the funeral, I had heard through the grapevine that she had passed on because the last encounter that we when I came back from Florida and I took some people down to her house, she was very pleasant, but... she was getting on my case (Lilian and Vivian)... told SR’s friend , SR “I worried about you when I was out on the streets I used to send you money.” SR’s grandmother saved the money and gave it to sylvia when she wanted to become a hairdresser. But then I decided I didn’t want to be a hairdresser.”

“I used to see her (gmother) about every two weeks” after leaving home.

“Her best line was, when I was with my first lover “That man made you do that.”

Grandmother was very prejudiced about SR going out with a white boy.

“I met my father when I was 4 or 5 he came over the house one time...”

Father Jose

“he tried to grab me and hug me and kiss me and I ran”

“I remember we used to end up at the tax office every year because they thought my grandmother was getting help from my father so they would always audit her”

“I have no respect for him (natural father), none whatsoever, the same thing with my stepfather.”

SR “I’m going to be 40 years old in July and I’ve never had sex with a woman.”

“I’ve had sex with men and that’s what I want.”

At times I hate my grandmother for the simple fact different things she has said to me while I was growing up.

Grandmother from Venezuelan, Mother from Venezuela and my father was PR, I was born here.

SR "My stepfather after about a year or so took my sister away from my grandmother and someone had adopted her." "Over the years she told me she just wanted my sister."

"I can understand her feelings at times and at times I still don't, I still try to figure it out."

"She was always paying someone else to take care of me. I went to public school for a while in Williamsburg in Bklyn I don't remember the school, I went to kindergarten and first and second grade there and finally my grandmother got ill and I remember coming home from school one day and there was I guess people from the state they came to pick me up and they took me to stay in St. Agnes Home in ? New York, I think I was 6 or 7 years old, maybe a little younger, I don't remember back that far, I remember I ended up in this home for a lot of years my grandmother got well after the first 6 months that I was there but she still left me there and but finally the only reason she took out of there was because the nuns there told her that I needed to be home so then again I started the rolling stone syndrome again so and so is going to take care of you while you go to school you got to live in queens, you got to live in LI you gotta do this and it just got I don't know I was I know that she loved me in her own way but I never really felt any love and she was the only person that could give me love and she didn't give me love, the lady that I call my aunt that lived over us in our bldg. On the lower east side her name was "Sarah" and she never had any kids and I was her child...." <<Sarah knew SR's mother and her>> "I always used to talk to her and tell her my feelings."

"(Grandmother) I never really wanted you."

"When I did something wrong I got my ass whipped... She beat the shit out of me."

"she raised my moms on her own too. When she was six months pregnant my grandfather left her, he was Mexican. "To her I was always a troublemaker but I never really was." Sylvia did domestic stuff at home and got a couple of dollars for helping neighbors clean."

"My grandmother was a pieceworker at Pickwick Mills in Bklyn."

"the refrigerator was always full."

"the last place I lived at before I ran away from home was out on LI."

"Grandmother paid \$100 a month to woman on LI to take care of her (Lisa?)... The woman was a bitch. I was going to an all white school." "She used to beat my fucking ass. She used to use a 2x4."

"My grandmother actually knew... we believe in Santerismo and she would always feel the pain that I was going through."

MD "how long were you with the family on LI, did that go on for years?"

SR "That went on for a few years until finally ? went off the wall one day and I attacked her when ? I couldn't take it... Actually her common law husband attacked me.... I think that was just before I ran away from home."

I know that after that ... that summer was a hard summer for me... my first sexual experience was at seven with a guy... I never had sex again until I was ten, the year I was running away I was just turning 11. I was very effeminate and people used to tease my gmother about that and it bothered her."

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SR “I’m going to be 40 years old in July and I’ve never had sex with a woman.”

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MD "What was school like, and all of that, since you knew about your sexuality so early did other people pick up on that? Did they give you a hard time?"

SR "Basically I remember more of LI when I was out there... Gym was kind of a problem for me because I didn't like to take showers in front of the boys but I enjoyed going into the locker room just to seem them walking around naked and going into the shower but I was actually, they really didn't pick up on it, the only time I got any static was from my 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and he was like um couldn't understand why I'd go to school wearing makeup and he wasn't rude or anything he just wanted to know why... he asked if my family knew I was wearing makeup and I said yes, they know. But he never really questioned it I used to leave the house every morning, put on some powder and go about my business

MD "it was as early as sixth grade?"

SR "Yeah, so it was really like you know, the only time I remember having a big major altercation at school was with this guy named Glen, I was skipping rope with the girls and he called me a faggot and I got so angry and I literally beat the shit out of him and he was literally twice the size of me... (check Stonewall for rest of story).

"That was the only time I had a problem in school."

"I started wearing makeup before sixth grade."

SR "I had done this thing for the spanish channels, 41 and 47, on the steps of city hall when the gay rights bill was being voted on, you know, the first time, my grandmother came and found me out on the hostos, "Why" "Why what" "Everybody saw you on TV" "And I said so" "Well they're making fun of me" "And I said am I living in your home?" .... I said I'm doing my thing for my people I said same thing you should have done a long time for your people, but I'm doing mine, so I said you have no reason to get uptight with me" "Well I don't want you to ever do that again for the spanish channel" "Well I said I will anything that I feel that I want to do I said if I'm asked to do an interview I will do it with whoever but she was very upset."

SR "There was this other queen who lived in our bldg."

THE HOSTRO "the hostro is where you're hustling, I used to hustle 9<sup>th</sup> ave in the 40s, I did the 8<sup>th</sup> ave bit."

Called grandmother "Viejita, it was my way of telling her I loved her, if I called her grandma she would get upset..."

SR "I remember my aunt and her husband were kissing they were tongue kissing and my grandmother said that was disgusting..."

SR "My first lover was Gary and we lived together for 7 years"

"The main hotel we lived I was called the Arista and that was on 43<sup>rd</sup> or 45<sup>th</sup> and Sixth Ave. it's not there anymore."

They used to spend weekends with father and mother of Gary in Flushing.

"It was like having family even though it was somebody elses."

"Frank is my second lover"

"I got to meet all his family, his younger brother" who was at reform school. (Kenny).

"The time I served time on Rikers Island he made sure, he was doing time and he's like uh, you put her with me you're not putting her nowhere but with me, nobody will fuck with Miss Sylvia that's my sister in law. But Gary was a good guy, now he's married and he has kids."

MD "Is that why you broke up, he decided to get married?"

SR "Well, he finally started finding his I guess his heterosexuality because when we started going together he had never been with a woman and I guess whatever happened happened but he gave me a great honor both his kids, he has a girl that's called Sylvia and the boy is called after him but he has my name the boy's name is Gary Ray and the girls name is Sylvie".

MD Are you still in touch

SR "Well actually about 10 years and get in touch with him, when I started going with Frank. Get in touch with him and that was our last ...?... together.

MD "Gary was also on 42<sup>nd</sup>"

SR "We both were hustlers"

SR "The Street (42<sup>nd</sup>) used to belong to the gay people."

SR Re. The disney film The Aristocats "My second lover Ralph took me to see it."

SR "I never stayed in school. All I had was a sixth grade education. But I have managed to hold 3 different management jobs in food service."

SR "the streets taught me a lot. I did try to go back maybe 10 years ago I was going to take the GED up here at Sleepy Hollow and uh, ? was willing to help me and I was going for about a month until the teacher got very abrupt with me you know cause I explained to him when I first met him I said look I have a sixth grade education and a lot of this shit you're teaching now we didn't even have in school so I said whatever you do do not embarrass me in front of the class and one day he must have been feeling his oats because he embarrassed me I very nicely ??? I do not want to be degraded. I'm trying to make an effort do not make me feel like a fool.

"I was really into it because ? was coming up every week because you know she teaches math and english...."

SR re time in school "Sports, I was a good runner, I was good at the parallel bars and things like that, I remember my gym teacher used to keep me after gym class when it was the last class to teach me how to catch a football, I catch the football and one thing leads to another and next thing I knew I was in the lockerroom with him carrying on so I actually learned to play football through the fact that I was enjoying learning what I was learning on the other end. That was fun. My 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher in public school.. I always had a crush on him and he's driving me home and he says "you want to go for a ride" and I said "sure we'll go for a ride you don't have to take me straight home and I said ...and we're in the back seat of his car and here's a married man with 8 children already and sure now I'm definitely the teachers pet."

First sex was with a male cousin = Sylvia 7 and him 14.

MD "Can you tell me more about 42<sup>nd</sup> street, who did you make friends with, where did you hang out?"

SR "I made friends with Marsha"

SR "Marsha was my first queen friends"

MD "She's about 5 years older, is that right?"

SR "She's got to be about 5 years older, she can't be in her fifties, maybe she is, I don't know..."

MD "You've lost track?"

SR "But um, we all used to hang out on the corner but there was one place we all used to congregate and that was Bixby's Restaurant (?) that was in the middle of 42<sup>nd</sup> street right on the main strip and there were many a nights that they'd pull up the paddy wagon right

to the doorway "Ok ladies let's go, we're going for a ride, but wait a minute I just got my hamburger buddy do you mind if I eat my hamb at least " no you can't eat your hamburger, get in the paddy wagon." " Those you know it was like something you looked forward to because we would sit there at times and say they missed up on their quota today, we'll meet here tomorrow, because you were always out of jail within the night within the day, it was usually over night, they would hold us in the tombs. The first time I was arrested I was walking down this street with this queen named Chickie and she's like keep walking and I'm like why and she says the bulls are after us... and we ended up spending the weekend in jail.

### Tape 02888 10/12/90

SR "That year you have written down on paper and what not it was Gay ?? was supposed to lead the march out and the STAR group was supposed to be behind them we conceded to the fact that we'd give the 82club the front because of the popularity and whatnot and I had already been asked to be one of the speakers but thanks to Jean O'Leary and her radical lesbian that she is, the old dominican nun.

MD "Talks about her embezzling funds from the big group in California that she was heading up and she was harrassing femaile employees it was a big scandal all over the gay press she was booted out.

SR "She was the only one who caused us problems"

MD "Who asked you to speak Sylvia?"

SR "I was asked to speak to do a speech by Marla Jean and also the ? because they had coordinated behind, bebe was one of the marshalls, they were coordinated with 82 that year so that the drag queens would be properly recognized besides the STAR group. Because you figure that the 82club and all drag show had been liberating peoples lives for so many years and that's why we conceded to the fact yes that they could lead the march in front of the STAR group because they are a theatrical group and the world has to realize that people in the theater are also gay but Jean O was the one who fucked everything up for us she's the one who started all the bullshit.

MD "So even before you got to the platform she was complaining?"

SR "Oh, yeah, she was complaining where she had made her statement well known and I had been forewarned that there probably would be a little problem and I said you already asked me to speak and I said that I will speak my mind and that's why ? threw her tiara into the crowd and told them all to go fuck themselves because she has done a lot for the movement which people don't realize she wrote the Mattachine, she was involved with the Mattachine and she was awarded a ? of her own for man of the year but all she did was throw a lot of drag balls for them to raise money so this is why, who's that guy I had it out with a year ago? MD "Howard ?" I don't know why they put him on the same panel. Randy Wicker? "Yes, he's very conservative and he came in late to that speaking engagement and the first thing that came out of his mouth was that I should (RW) have been first being that I was there first and I spoke openly and this that and the other and he started on the drag queens I very nicely had to curse him out. I literally cursed him out.

MD "That was on tape"

SR "I don't think they taped the first one we did."

SR "He (RW) just like very nicely stepped on the drag queens like we were cockroaches, and I very nicely told him what about Lou Lusta who fucking raised all the monies for your organization for the longest time by throwing drag balls.

MD "You know RW was against stonewall when it happened"

SR "Oh, he was against anything"

MD "He was early I mean he did do the first this and the first that he was kinda of a one man show."

SR "He did his thing except what I think is what upset him the most is that someone else started raining on his parade I mean he was doing his thing I remember when we marched on the UN and he wrote an article and "yes Ray Rivera, better known as Sylvia Rivera, was there in his military outfit. Yes I had a military thing on I was doing a protest against gays and a protest against the war why put me down if you know my name is sylvia in the movement keep me as sylvia . Ray Rivera is my name but I don't use it, I use my mother's last name and that's I use my father's last name for movements or for when I got into jail or anything just for the fact that I have no respect for him so I have no respect for the name but my families name and the one that I use and you can print it is Mendoza and that is my family's name and I'm very proud of it and Randy Wicker always tried to put me down.

MD "Why would you use Sylvia Rivera's name in the movements work when you are proud of Mendoza?"

SR " When I started in the movement and when I first left home I was embarrassed I wasn't embarrassed in the movement it's just that Sylvia became such SR was already there so it already stayed there so it's actually Sylvia Lee Rivera, I had like it was given to me I remember the first time they tried to figure out what name to name me.... (see Stonewall")

SR "I had a beautiful white gown on and what not..."

SR "There were a lot of hispanics hanging out..."

SR "IT was just like being reborn..."

SR "The ceremony, Marsha was there, my friend Chickie there were so many people there... there had to be at least 50 people..."

MD "you had started telling me about when you first met Marsha which I also wanted to hear, down on 42<sup>nd</sup>?"

SR "Yeah, that's like shit... Marsha's best line which she still has and that was the line back then she didn't have that line but it was like I met her it wasn't really actually it was on 42<sup>nd</sup> street and 6<sup>th</sup> avenue that I met her and she was standing on the corner and she still had her waitress pants on and her white shirt she was panhandling "do you have any spare change, do you have any spare change?" and I don't know why I identified to her and I just like went over to her and started talking to her and I'm like "do you go to 42<sup>nd</sup> street and she's like I'm.... (see stonewall)

"Typical Marsha, a pocketful of money and she still wants to hustle"

"That's how we met and it's like what's your name and I'm like well I told her it's ray and I said that they already changed it to Sylvia..."

Sylvia told Marsha she's 11 ½ years old and Marsha said " Oh, miss thing you're so young you really should be home with your mother. And I said how old are you and "oh, don't worry about it they call me the old queen because I've been around for so long."



“Every queen that saw Marsha “Oh, hello Miss Marsha, even the hustlers, hi Marsha girl how you doing?” all the way down the street...

SR “She was on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue (MPJ) and I was coming from the opposite direction and she said stand here and panhandle with me.... (see Stonewall)

SR “Marsha’s internationally known, I’ve known Marsha for a lot of years I love Marsha very very dearly. I would do anything for Marsha.”

She has helped a whole lot of people and the only thing that angers me about the fact that everything that Marsha has done about helping people and doing things in the movement and still doing things in the movement that no one really has given her the recognition she deserves. She has never gone anywhere ??? I mean even Andy Warhol when he painted her asked ?? portrait only paid her a couple of hundred dollars which he sold for thousands of \$s I thought was a rip off.

He, Marsha deserves to this day Bob and I ... and everytime I see Bob Kohler and we talk and he says what are we going to do when Marsha passes on and I say God damnit we’re blowing a whole lot of money the bitch is going in grand style I said she is not going as a pauper. RW helped her out.

MD “Well she lives with him now.

SR “I don’t think she’s there now. I know she was living with him when we had the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary but I think something happened. He locked her out or something. Randy has helped her, that’s one thing I can say about him that he at least does help her and give you know but um Marsha deserves a lot more than what she’s gotten from the community.

MD I think that’s true of M and you...

SR “You can go anywhere in the world where there is a gay community and all you got to say is Marsha Johnson, oh, yes, we’ve seen pictures of her and there was a PR queen who went to PR one time and she said you’ll never believe who I saw at the disco I was at and I said who she says they were flashing pictures of NY and the people involved in the movement and who do you think was there they had all these pictures of Marsha Johnson. So then I got a little perturbed and I said what happened to mine and she said you were there but it’s just the point that Marsha was there in PR.

It was like she is world renowned and I’m sure that I am too but her pictures and her attitude has been known a lot more than I have.

MD “Well you’re thought of more of as a political person and as somebody who has really put yourself on the line for the movement Marsha’s involvement with the movement was never that strong was it I mean with STAR house yes,

SR “Marsha was involved a lot with the movement, no, with GOL, when I joined GAA she was with GOL and Marsha has always had a problem with expressing she starts expressing one thing and she jumps into another thing even before she started losing some of her faculties and when we started our group of course it was mine and Marsha’s I wanted to give her the prestige of being the president of that group the few members we had started with we had already discussed and we had wrote it in that and she very nicely declined it she said you will be the head I will be your vice president and I asked her why she said it’s because you stay on one thought when you speak and anything you do you stay on one thought and she very nicely admitted it “I tend to go off in other directions” It really bothered me because it was actually we sat there one night just her and I and I said maybe we should just start a group of our own and we discussed it and I mean it was one

of those few conversations that she actually stayed on one trend when we were planning it including STAR House when we planned that it was her and I we planned before for us we knew that we could make it but it was we were thinking about the young kids I mean we slept in doorways, the best one is they had this trailer one of them big 18 wheelers and we had been using it for about a month Marsha and I would go out and hustle we'd pick up breakfast and whatnot for the kids we would tell them you know if you don't want to go out there and sell your bodies don't do it but if you want to do it on your own Whatever you get you have to push back into helping all of us Marsha and I would be out there hustling and we were coming down the street one day from the Silver Dollar on Christopher St. made the turn and the trailer was being moved and we're looking at each other like oh my God the kids, all the kids are in there so of course we see all these young queens and young boys young hustlers jumping out of the back of the truck the back of this trailer because you know we're standing there "oh, my God the children!" WE dropped all the food because we used to go to the Silver dollar by 6 o'clock we'd buy everybody something to eat and we'd wake everybody up and feed them and well we gotta do what we gotta do go panhandle go do what you gotta do. WE're standing there like two yentas, your talking about two crazy women "oh no the kids the kids, oh please don't take the children, two crazy women in full drag. We lost one, one ended up all the way in California because the bitch was stoned out on downs the ? was so stoned out on downs that a couple of days later she called one of the bars "I'm out in Ca. They took by truck you don't know they almost threw me in jail "I said bitch you're the only one out of 20 I said well we thought we had lost you all."

MD This was before STAR house, you're way of helping the ..

SR "Yeah, this was before STAR and this was when we decided fuck it we have to go talk this was when hanging out with this other queen, I can't forget bubbles, crazy bitch that she is I don't even know if she's alive she was from Fla. She was in that trailer that morning too but bubbles said let me go talk to michael Umbras? God rest his soul. WE didn't want to deal with them

MD he was a famous thug, he was a vicious guy.

SR "WE got the bldg. We put up some money we had some money and we got into this bldg and I was like what the fuck did we pay for? We had widows but we had no plumbing that's number one , I'm like we've got to move the kids in. With this I had the promise of the community that once we .. they would help us set it up (GAA, GOF?) anything anybody that was involved with the movement. I said we're going to take the bldg over we're going to turn it into a school, we're going (Mark Rubin included?) we're going to teach my kids so they can get ahead in life. So when the shit went down nobody came and helped the only person that came to help us do anything was Bob Kohler, he helped paint, clean the yard, we used hoses for plumbing put them into all the apts. Boiler didn't work we sat there for hours, first Marsha, myself, Bambi and Andora we sat there 3 queens that don't know shit about nothing, next thing we knew this motherfucker was working thank god we didn't blow each other up. Back then I was shooting drugs, Marsha never shot drugs or did drugs, Bambi Andora and I were into the drugs.... We did it and we did what we had to do and we tried to take care of the kids and then when the community didn't help of course we told the kids we can only do so much. We're trying to carry a whole building now.

The First STAR dance was done at the Alternate U?

My kids presented me with it was 11 o'clock in the morning and everyone was thanking me for whatever and my kids bought me the most beautiful bouquet of red roses. And I stood there and I cried and like A Bell said in his book... I don't believe my kids they were my kids

We used to give bubbles the money

Rushed to 2<sup>nd</sup> street to confront bubbles, she said the money went for repairs, Michael the landlord was threatening to kill bubbles and Sylvia said that she would turn him in if he killed Bubbles. Don't fucking kill somebody over it.

SR I remember I used to get pissed, she used to stand on one corner, I used to.. and Marsha used to stand on one corner

Not knocking Marsha because she was into this outrageous makeup even back then we used to push her....

Bubbles being bubbles... Bambi, Andora and me used to take the corner, we'd send Marsha and Bubbles down to 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue...

I never really did have that much trouble I've had people pull guns on me to rip me off I was very smart whatever I wore wherever I put my money was not in my bag

SR "I hustled as a boy earlier"

SR "My girlfriend Kim she was a real girl"

SR "5 years (shooting heroin)"

MD "What made you stop with the dope?"

SR "A girlfriend Lady June passed, she was trying to kick, we were all trying to kick, we were buying Methadone off the street, and she mixed it, we always did it... we all did our normal thing.. and she bought her own bottle and I was at the dance with Marsha, Bambi and Andora and myself we're dancing and dancing we're carrying on and I said I gotta go home there is something wrong and Marsha said to me there is something wrong I've been feeling it and I said Marsha you're stronger than I am why don't you go to the house and come back then she called June died from Methadone, ? and booze and it was hard on us because the family was in Philadelphia and that's one thing I have the habit I still have my old bible around I have everybody's names there and number in case anything happened to us and I could call but she had given me her aunt's number that lived here in the city so I called. Marsha and I went to South Philly and went to every spanish hairdressing salon until we found her mother. We knew that she was a hairdresser in S. Phil we went trekking and this was in between me having to stop to shoot up.

Just to see her laying there the way she was it took a lot out of me we locked up the house after that and I told Marsha what I was going to do because it was Marsha's house and I said let me stay here for a week and let me kick. It was hard for me it was very hard to kick. No booze, no nothing, I just sat there and I went crazy, it took a lot out of me. I didn't want to die. I did not want to die. If I got to die today let me die of something but not I just didn't want to die like that I felt that she was so alone. It was after the movement was going as a matter of fact it was before 73 because the jumpsuit that I wore in 73 (to Gay Pride) was June's and she was already gone.

She was just a very close friend, another queen that hustled the streets we all made rounds together.

You see, I don't know if the gay community realizes it and maybe I should make that quite clear that the drag queen has a strong bond for each other and we make our own little families because we have to because nobody else is there and after what the

movement did to us there is no other family except our own and to this day yes I march and make sure I'm there and I only do that out of spite because I know they don't want me there. Last year I felt a little bit more appreciation but the years prior to that I knew they didn't want me there and I would make it a point I only missed 2 marches in 20 years but I make it a point to be there for the simple fact that I want to show them that I am still alive and I am still a front runner and you have to remember your history they always try to keep us out of their history and they'll always try to do that. Now with the interviews I've done in the last couple of years I know people want to know but in the years 73 and 74, we're nothing but trash... this is what pisses me off about the movement... and I just feel that my side of the community has the right...?? We liberated people just by doing shows just by doing shows, who was doing shows before the gay liberation movement.... Every dragqueen at the 82 was nothing but a fucking fag.

MD "You never performed at the 82 did you?"

SR "no"

MD "did you ever perform at any of the clubs?"

SR "I started performing up here (Westchester) when I moved here, I was more of a street queen and a hustler that was my stage being a hustling queen and when I moved up here I started performing.

MD "Andora and Bambi, I don't know anything about them"

SR "Bambi I met in jail the first time I had to wait to go to trial, the most beautiful black drag queen you could ever see, we met on Rikers Island and we were going to breakfast... WE became friends in jail.... We shot up together

Andora was one of my kids from STAR house Andora was a beautiful, I think she's still alive, young, light skin, very heavy set so anything we did to her she would look like a woman, Andora became part of our fivesome Andora, Bambi, Marsha, myself and K?? She was one of my kids that was living on the streets and we took her under our wings. Ran into Bambi in the village after she was living in Westchester and Bambi wanted to cop some dope and SR went with her as far as 59<sup>th</sup> street, Sylvia said no she didn't want to go and Bambi took offense and called her names etc. It really hurt me and I sat on the train and cried because she was supposed to be friends and sisters and she's passed on and I was sorry I wasn't around to give her a helping hand. She didn't need to die like that.

MD asked about hormones. SR took them for a while but came to the conclusion that she did not want to be a woman "I like pretending, the whole world for me is a stage I like to dress up."

SR "I don't want to be a woman"

SR "I did think about the sex change, that's not what I want"

SR "I have fun 3 or 4 times a year I get dressed up on Halloween, Gay Pride Day or whenever I feel like it."

"If I were a woman I wouldn't be me, I wouldn't be Sylvia Rivera"

SR "The girl from the NY Times came up (to Westchester) to do an interview with me for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the photographer was up here for hours taking pictures..."

"I don't know why that article got squashed"

Tape 02889 No. 1 10/14/90

Hotel is Aristo not Arista.

Moved the STAR truck, 1970s, it was after Weinstein demonstration, STAR house came after the trucking incident.

Met Bambi on rikers island in 1970.

A June 25, 1990 NY Native article about stonewall... Jeremiah Newton wrote a letter saying basically Sylvia started the riot by throwing the first bottle... Sylvia didn't remember.

SR "WE were ladies in waiting like Shakespeare said, we were waiting for the revolution to come and happen and I was there and enjoyed every minute of it"

MD mentions Steven Watson interview and talks about Marsha's birthday party that night.

SR "During the whole riot that night I never bumped into Marsha Never bumped into Marsha, that's how crazy it was that night that's how fabulous it was that night actually because no one really knew who was friend or foe it's like I remember getting the invitation from Marsha but at that time I was doing bad paper at that time and I was out of town my first lover and I we came back we had money in our pockets and we decided to go? To stonewall ..."

SR "There was always a wall up between "male" gays and drag queens.

SR "That wall is still there, it was down for 4 years and then they rebuilt it that's why I have such hatred for the community I don't own them nothing I feel they owe me more than I owe them as far as political wise they own me more I don't owe them nothing. United we stand divided we fall, the movement now is going in too many directions when I remember getting very upset when they decided to make it the lesbian and gay movement I always thought lesbian and gay were all under one banner we were all gay I can't understand the logic behind it ... The word has been around for I don't know how many years it has always been gay, faggot dike or drag queen I don't understand why it has to be lesbian and gay... the women I met in the first 4 years of the movement were not unhappy we all raised each other's consciousness..."

SR says Jean O'leary and her point of view was when the whole movement started falling apart.

MD Reaction of women to transvestites... Arthur Bell says that lesbians gave Sylvia makeup tips

SR I loved Judy (the carpenter) she was the most beautiful woman... we dealt with street dykes... meeting Judy was beautiful she helped myself and a few other queens out when we were out on the street, she opened her home and let me stay there... Judy was very upset what happened in our fourth anniversary march, she wrote me and I have the letter in one of my boxes, it made me cry...

SR "I remember talking to Kay Tobin at GAA  
Sylvia says they respected each other but Jean Oleary didn't have any respect.  
Jean Oleary joined a convent and then came out and preached her gospel to the gay  
community.  
It took until the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary to find out the history of what happened in 1969.

SR "Even today I know that they feel that we are a degrading segment of their  
community but they'll just have to get over it."

SR " In 70 I picked up the gay power newspaper, oh GLF, GAA, it was nice, oh, how  
interesting." SR called GAA " I called and ended up getting Jim Owles and..."

MD & SR "Arthur Bell quotes Sylvia as saying GLF was too radical for her but Sylvia  
says it was probably a misquote."

SR "I bumped into Marsha on the street and she said you gotta come to GL.. and I said  
I'm involved with GAA... it was april when I joined them... living and working in Jersey  
at that time I would come into the city and wouldn't bother to pick up the literature"

MD "What did happen to you immediately after Stonewall?"

SR "I just went back home to Jersey, my lover and I were doing our thing and everything  
in the media was gone....

><<< didn't run into Marsha in the weeks after Stonewall>>>>

SR Didn't get a response from GLF so went to GAA.

SR was one of the people who confronted Lindsay at the Museum.

SR did petition drive on 42<sup>nd</sup> street between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> avenues for gay rights.

SR Worked the Graveyard shift at the A&P warehouse in Jersey.

Tallied up sheets for the truckers.

Wore full makeup and loud clothes.

SR Arthur has info about sylvia's petition and arrest in one of his articles.

SR "When I climbed City Halls walls I only had 2 cocktails." Mentions Bebe.

Arthur Bell did an article in Gay Power probably in 1970 or 1971 on Sylvia probably  
May or June of 1970

This article is what made Sylvia well known

SR Met Bob Kohler at GLF.

SR getting involved with both GAA and GLF. Marched with GAA in first march in  
1970. Power struggle within GAA and Sylvia feels she was part of the problem.

### **Tape 02890Duberman interview with Sylvia 10/14/90**

Marsha brought me up on charges one time on embezzling funds.

SR I think it's when Arthur or Steve, whatever, ok I did take the money but I took myself and another representative down to a the People's Revolutionary Convention and she felt that I had embezzled funds.

MD What was that about climbing the wall at City Hall?

SR Well that was one of the times that well ok we had went to the City Hall hearings I think it was the second time the bill was presented and they never finished voting they never finished their arguments on that Friday so what happened that Monday, no actually what happened that Friday was that it did not come out to a decisive vote and we went crazy and I remember laying out in the streets I mean we blocked traffic down there by City Hall I mean it went crazy it was really fabulous for the simple fact that it was rainy day and we had you know everybody had testified and this that and the other and they did not come to a conclusion and we ran out into the streets and started blocking the traffic and whatnot I don't know they must have picked me up at least 4 or 5 times and put me on the sidewalk, everytime they did that I'd run up in front of another car and I'd lay my ass back down. I was wearing a mini dress and all this wetness???? and I thought oh my God I'm going to look horrible for the press but it was like finally they they had people in the Paddy Wagon already and I get finally thrown in there and I mean literally thrown in there they went whomp and I went huh well at least the brothers and the sisters already in there caught me because I would have cracked my head. And the first thing that I see sitting and I mean she wasn't even trying to help was Jean O'Leary and I said "ooh, they got you too huh bitch?" I said I never thought you had it in you. I never forget them words I said "I never thought you had it in you to go to jail you bitch." I said that I'm here right along with you. Well they packed us in there they had us packed in there like sardines which is the brothers and the sisters that were not doing the thing that we were doing, laying out in front of cars and whatnot, they started rocking the paddy wagon, they were rocking it, and like "oh God" then we were holding up to the, you know they have two bars inside the paddy wagon, they were rocking it and we were going right along with the flow. "Turn this bitch over." They did get us in then, we did tip it and they had to put us in another one and we went down to the precinct, I don't know what precinct is in that area, everybody got stuck together except for me I got stuck all by myself and I'm like "oh god"

MD This was you in drag?

SR Yeah, like you know the brothers were all in one place, and like, they were all in the same holding area they could have even talked to each other, me I was all the way on the other side of the bldg. I'm like anything can happen in there. And then I'm thinking you know things ran through my mind that a lot of times I'm arrested at demonstrations everytime I acutally would get afraid because I always was by myself and I thought what if they come in here and just kill me? B

MD Or at least beat the shit out of you.

SR Yeah, beating the shit out of me I mean I could deal with but my whole fear in my mind is that they would kill me. They're going to come in here and kill me. And I would panic.

I was very panicky at that point in my life and like you know a lot I know that for a fact I remember walking into the precinct in the village one time and they picked us up they

thought I was someone who robbed somebody me and this other queen, it was different but there was a poster up on the 6<sup>th</sup> precinct, is that the one in the village. It's the 10<sup>th</sup> precinct, the one on Charles St and there was a poster there "This is Sylvia Rivera one of the manipulators of the gay movement and I was like I'm looking at this poster and I'm like "manipulator"? But then they said manipulator and leader of the movement and like I say again I knew that the first 4 years of the movement I could snap a finger and I could start anything I really you know after the first year and going the last three years before the fourth march I would go anywhere and sylvia could do anything so people would follow through. So I'm looking at this poster and a matter of fact Marsha was with me and this other queen Tadika? Was with me because all three of us was together and they was trying to say we ripped off somebody and we're like we weren't even out hustling last night what the fuck are you talking about? What with this I had like six, seven hundred dollars in my pocket but this was all for our first STAR dance and it's all in hundred dollar bills and whoever got ripped off by these queens had 100 dollar bills so I'm like I said look somebody's going to get hanged and I'm looking at this poster but then after that I was always scared for my life I said Oh My God they could kill me at any given time and they could make anything up.

MD What was the outcome of the petition drive?

SR That was finally thrown out. Because the officer who arrested me never showed up.

MD Why not?

SR I'm sure he was told by his superiors not to show up because it was becoming too controversial.

Too much press, you know and they were I guess they were really beginning to feel that it wasn't just Stonewall riot it's just that we were moving and I think that in between all of that's when we presneted Carol (Greitzer) her petition.

MD Were you there that night

SR Yeah, I'm the one who got to give it to her.

She would n't take it out of my hands so I ended up smaking her upside the head with the petition.

MD Was that written up?

SR Yeah, that was written up.

MD I don't remember. Fill in some more details on that.

SR It was time to present them, we all met at Jim Owles house because that at thiat time was the basic GAA headquarters. De and I was there early and I'm looking at her and she's talking. I said let's go out and get a drink. I need a couple of drinks cause now I'm completely black beauties not to be seen anymore, they were still there but they weren't as handy as before because I had other things on my mind so everyone had a couple of drinks and we went back to Jim Owles and we went over to the Village Independents club with everybody else and the politicians were there (MD right on sheridan square) it was right next door to the gym so we went there and things were said and I had the petition I had one stack of petitions actually the other ones were put in front of the podium but I was to present them to her and she made the comment like she would support anything but she would not endorse it and I was like I said will you please take these from on hand to another and she said no and I bopped her upside the head with ???? now bitch., you 've got to take them one way or another I said I'm going through these



changes I said do thing I'm going to spend my time arguing and she backed away from me and she was like "I don't have to take them, I don't have to take them" I saw her one time on 42<sup>nd</sup> street because you know that's part of her district and I was standing there and I never forget her face I was with a whole bunch of people and I said come on girls whatever I say you all follow through "You fucking whore you don't make enough money in the city council you have to come up here and steal the money from the queens, huh, and the rest of the ho's , you fucking bitch." And she walked around and you know like the two guys that were with her and she's like "watch him the main one cause he's out" and I'm like, talking about me, and I said "That's right miss thing I said don't forget the name is ray sylvia rivera honeyand I'll bop you upside the head again. Like was like a month or two months later (than the first time at VID) and she like completely freaked out and said "where's the car, get the car" the other guy said would you bring me a car and I said you better get in your motherfucking car because all these whores down here will fucking jump you in a minute."

MD We never finished City Hall either.

SR What, with the climbing?

MD Yes

SR Oh, that was cute when I climbed up there I got up to that ledge cause what was funny was we had all been arrested all right and we got out and that Monday they were going to have the vote but we were not allowed into the bldg. We were all completely blocked off BB showed up in a beautiful red maxi skirt I showed up with this other queen named Miss Chickie we had just come off the hosto actually a couple of hours before so we went home and changed chickie and myself and the hosto is where we hustled and at that time I was into drugs I went home and shot up and did my thing got my hair together . I was shooting dope and coke, speed balls.

But, it was like , that was also a rainy day , but then it was when really loud puerto rican polyester bellbottoms you know whith all these colors and I had a midriff stuck on and we showed up there and they kept telling everybody whoever the leaders of the movement at that time that they were going to let us in and it was 2 hours, 3 hours and I said hey I'm going to show you all how to get in ????? no way, on the third floor the second floor whatever it is and I said you see that it's open and that's where they're holding the vote I'm going to show you how to get in there and I'm going to go in that window and I'm going to open up the doors. So we contemplated that the third hour right bb says let's go have a cocktail and I say ok so we go up to this bar somewhere and it's just me her and chickie and all these men in suits and whatnot and here they're looking at these two floozies (behind the bar) ( we were trying to look conservative) and I'm like they've got these little body skin suits up the ass and what not and I say they might as well show their tits so of course we never paid for our drinks because we walked in and ordered our drinks and one man sat next to bb and says I'm going to buy them a drink and I says well I'm going to have this so you know we have like 2 or 3 cocktails maybe 4 maybe more who know and we're sitting there and we said we better get back I started maybe we better get back in case something comes off and we're not there so I said B, let me stop at the liquor store and get at least a pint in case anything happens I want to make sure I have something to drink before they take me in. I really wasn't into alcohol as much as I am now but I still wanted to have something I don't know I guess it

was a pacifier so I but the bottle we go back everyone says "they won't let us in, they won't let us in" and I said what did I tell you I'll come and get you in the window and I nicely worked my way across the crowds, Marsha was there, she finally showed up, yeah, I remember that because she was there after we came back from the cocktails, and she was like, "But where you girlies been?" and I said "well we've been having cocktails." I said we're going to work our way around the crowd. With this everybody is getting a little uptight because we had already told some you know "Well Miss Sylvia you really should.." "What the fuck you gonna stand there if you're not charging the damn bldg. And I tell her, I knew people were getting uptight and people said "you know sylvia you shouldn't do this" and I said "you're not charging the building what the hell are you standing out here for I said let's be realistic that's the only way to prove a point that's to get something across to them that we're not afraid of them">

So with this we work our way around from the front of the building to the side of the bldg. You know the cops are worrying about the main crowd in the front I slip around I had this big huge shoulder bag with me and I'm looking and I'm like oh, well no problema nd I kick off the heels and I said all right and I look up again and I looked good from far away but when you look at it close I'm like you know umph? Let's have another drink so I reached in the bag and I said bb didn't I tell you I needed this bottle? So I started. By the time I got to the first story

MD What did you just scale the wall

SR Yeah

Cause you have enough room, cause they have big bricks if you ever go see city hall they have big like cinderblock bricks and they have enough (pause meaning space) and I'm like being very daring cuase this was like I was telling people that I used to do that when I was younger and I used to do second story work and then I'm realizing as I'm moving that I'm a little bit older now and a little bit heavier that's why I needed the bottle I'm like "let's have another drink." Finally I got up to the first floor there's a ledge there I though oh hallelujah, but that...??? So we, Marsha and everybody went and told them what I was doing so the crowd moved away from the front of the bldg to the side of the bldg I'm trying to be nice so no one sees I'm nipping on a bottle so I start up again to the next one and I'm oh lord please don't let me fall down, that's all I ask don't let me fall. I finally got all the way to where I was going and the window was still open as soon as I reached that motherfucking ledge they closed the window so now I'm stting on this little ledge and oh well and everybody's screaming and going off chanting and carrying on and I'm still sitting up there and I'm like everyone can see me if I take a nip out of my bottle and I say you know what fuck em I pulled out my bottle and I said I know I'm going to jail so fuck it and I said if I got to jail with my bottle they're going to throw it out so cops come and say "Sylvia if you jump we won't take you to jail" and I'm like what do you think I'm an asshole, I'm not jumping I said you all better get a ladder up here and get me the fuck off this ledge or either you better let me in this window because I said I ain't going nowhere but with this I start to impose? And still with the bottle "oh, yes darling" and the crowd's going off bananas underneath and I'm like oh yeah, I should have brought a bigger bottle you know I could stay here for hours and the cops like "Sylvia I'm telling you if you jump" I said "Yeah, you're mama may jump but it Miss Sylvia jumping, uh, uh, I said you better come on up here and get me. They finally came up and

got me. They took me in. They let me out on a summons and said "you're a crazy bitch."

Summons, like a ticket, you have to appear in court.

So, I was like yeah, no problem, I'll be there in court.

So we went to court and that was dismissed too.

MD What year was that.

SR That was the second time they introduced the bill.

MD 72 or 73?

SR yeah, that was prior to the incident on the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

MD You finally left the movement when was it 73 or 74

SR I left it after the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary march.

That's when I stopped being an outspoken person I never left the movement me myself I never left the movement because I always went to the marches I've only missed like 2 marches in the 20 years they've been going on. And I make that quite clearly um the 2 or 3 marches I missed my job has come first at this time in my life because I do have to survive but when I did leave the movement as far as being an outspoken person and trying to enlighten people was at that 4<sup>th</sup> march.

MD It was as a result of that fight at the microphone

SR I had sixty stitches on my arm because of that. This is what I have on my arms because of that because after that a week later I was down and out because I didn't believe the way we were treated and I just I sat home and I dwelt on it all week and I said what the fuck between straight society and gay society I said what the fuck is it the use to live for ... Arthur bell came to see me when I was in there at the time

MD Were you in the hospital?

SR He taped something that I'm sure whoever has those tapes I'm sure will find them because I asked him never to print them because I didn't want the movement to know but know I feel that the movement should know. They fucked me, they fucked my community, they fucked everything that I believed in the gay community, and its very hard for me to get back involved into the community for the simple fact that I'm not going to forget what they did to us on that 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary I will walk the aids walkathons and will raise money and I will walk the march I will speak to people and the only reason that I speak to people is because I want the community toknow that we exisst and that we will always exist and that we are part of them

MD Maybe when the movement gets around to acknowledging the role you play you will feel welcome and will rejoin.

I'm hoping this book will pay you the kind of tribute you deserve.

SR You know what bothers me when I started in the movement maybe being that I staying out of the movement so long I thought that everything that we're going through now should have been under one umbrella, everything that we're fighting against AIDS, everhtng that we are fight against, you know, straight society itself, is what we should be fight as a movement together not as different segments of a movemnet and I don't know maybe I'm still a little bit in the old times but I feel that we should you have to unite because of the simple fact if you don't unite you don't have nothing going for yourselves.

MD You can't bring pressure to bear unless you're a strong united movement but I think its coming back to the early days because..

SR I hope so because that , I would gladly do anything for the movement like I said the only thing I do is I go out on lectures now, I did that even after the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary and I got involved in the AIDS walkathon and I do these things and I do things on my own for my own satisfaction that I know that I'm still raising straight people's consciousness like for me being a drag queen from the city and you've seen how well respected I am up here where I live I have liberated a lot of people in my own way because of my way of thinking and the way that I am.

The community just you know, they rather keep going back to that 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary They insulted me they insulted my community.

MD Talking about the movement etc. how lesbians and gays are working together against aids, doing zaps, laying down in the streets etc.

SR That's the way it's supposed to be.

SR You know the only thing that I dreamed of and maybe I'll see it is that I remember in the first two or three years of the march and everybody's marching out on the west coast and everybody's marching on the east coast and in between and we have representatives from the eastern board and they're all out there and the western part of the united states my whole dream was the one time that one march would start and figure it out how we can all end up simultaneously on the steps of washington all starting at one time to prove that there is a gay pride day just like the blacks did they would start in different areas.

MD That happened pretty much back in the October march (1987?) remember there were about 1/2 million gays and lesbians?

SR did they walk?

MD No they didn't walk, from Calif to Washington...

SR Well you see that's what I'm saying

So, you walk and you take a break, to prove to the world you have to make a sacrifice ...

MD You mean like the walk from Selma to Montgomery?

SR I would walk from here to Washington and back if I had to just to prove the point.

MD I'm not going to do that at my advanced age.

SR so we take a couple of wheelchairs...

I made a comment one time I don't know who when I said that Goddamn it if they have to wheel me down that avenue I'll be in a wheelchair but I'll be there with my dress on.

MD After you were in GAA then you got interested in GLF

SF It became too heavy for me (GAA) well actually I was getting more and more radical I didn't feel that GAA was enough for me and I wanted to be more more sylvia I didn't want to play the queen on the pedestal even though I had a lot of power over the people, I hate using that word, (MD "influence") I had a lot of influence over a lot of the GAA membership but it just I wanted to go and do more and I couldn't do it in GAA because they were beginning to lean more towards the Madison Avenue types things that they went into, you know the national task force and all this shit..

MD middle class white men pretty much

SR And I just couldn't I couldn't deal with it

MD GLF sounded like a more natural home for you.

They were talking about an alliance of all the oppressed.

SR I loved the GLF you know well before I got into GLF I have to make one little comment that belongs to GAA

There was a friend there, his name was Lavar?, he's a young black man and he sat there one day at a meeting and he cried his eyes out because he simply told the meeting he said yes I listened to sylvia last week and I went home and I told my mother and my father that I was gay and this child was a very revolutionist child because he ended up joining GLF prior to when I did but he had the room to himself because he wanted the world to know where he was coming from but he told GAA he says you're not for me for the simple fact because your not enough outspoken you're too lax your going towards the other way.

MD too lax about black rights...?

SR No, it was just lax with gay rights themselves, it was a very touching meeting because he did have the whole room in tears because it had hurt him to get up and tell what he had done to his family and I remember him saying that he was not accepted in his home anymore because of what he told them.

MD What did he want gaa to do?

SR No, because GAA was not being radical enough, it was being very lax, everything was about turning the other cheek.

MD ((paraphrase)) says he thgouth people left GLF because GAA would be more focused on gay rights rather than panthers, young lords etc.

SR Yeah, but they were still forgetting everything else, look, everything that GAA did in the beginning was fine, it was cute, but when you cannot lose the support of the world like I would say it again we were all ... you cannot turn yourself away from what's going on in the world GAA did so much but you cannot turn the world against you GLF, we supported the panthers, I had the pleasure of meeting huey p newton at that Peoples revolutionary convention, I had that pleasure to meet him as a human being and we spoke for a total of 5 minutes and it was on of my gretaests, I wish I could relive that I wish I had that on tape but ....

MD Tell me about that

SR But GAA believed in one cause but then once you believe in one cause that's when the women came in and started bitching you cannot believe in one cause because in the beginning it was basically gay men except for kay tobin and her girlfriend so there was no really consciousness raising among the gay men and the gay women and then jean o'learey came in and then there was another Static? Yeah, I think that you know ... when the revolutinary world accepted the gay revolution as a revolution how the hell can the gay world turn against the revolution when we were all fighting against the same thing, oppression, that's what GAA had their bad stance on.

SR The Young Lords, I remember marching from Harlem with the YL's we were the contingent behind the YL's the STAR organization marching down to the UN and the YL's we were arm in arm I was in with the two leaders of the YL's marching from harlem to the UN and my contingent was the STAR and the GLF group because we supported them and they supported us

I was with the Lords, the only reason we got with the Lords was because I was one of the hispanic queens and I don't like using hispanic and I don't like using hispanic., I like using spanish because hispanic is something that white people made later on, I am a

spanish queen and I got a long I lived in harlem and I had the respect of them and it's like I hung out with the weathermen, oh, yeah, we can go into a lot of history here.

MD Did you actually leave GAA

SR I never left GAA because as far as for many years after I was always a member of GAA because BB would always pay my annual tuition dues to make sure that I was there that I was always on the road and she always taught history comes and she said you must be in the history books but I never really but I did leave them and I went to GLF and what happened with that was Weinstein, it came and I was homeless, I had broken up with my lover I had given up my job I had given up my apt I had already gave someone my dog I gave her the most beautiful home right there on christopher street

Gary and I broke up and I still had the apt and iwas getting so innvolved with the movemennt iwas fucking up on my job at the warehouse so one day I decided fuck it it's time to go (end of side of tape).

SR I called up my aunt and said come get my sewing machine, come get this and I'm taking the dog, my albums, my clothes, and that's when my street life for the movement began, again, I was always a street hustler and I gave up a lot for the mvment because I got so involved and GLF was there.

MD Weinstien was when

SR I was sitting in stonewall park sitting right there I call that bench number 13 and bob kohler came by and said Sylvia they're having a sit in and I said where and he said at Weinstein Hall, I rmember I had a shopping cart and a suitcase and I said what'm I going to do with this and he says I'll bring the shopping cart you bring the suitcase and he says come on we need you there so we went and we walked into in front of weinstein he had the damn shoppoing dohickeyand I had my suitcase so we walked downstairs and Marsha showed up and this one showed up there was so many people there and people acutally did come in with suitcases, I didn't feel bad, I thought at least I didn't feel bad, these were working folks, working gays, Marsha and bubbles, and andora and ??? it was cute but the first night was no problem, the first day throught the first night the students were coming down and talking to us and bringing us food and this that and the other, the one's that had to go to work had to go to work, the gay brothers and sisters that were there but the students at least alleviated that we weren't left by ourselves cause there was always enough of a student body there and they were interested they were always asking questions and they were all fascinated and I remember one woman asking me "well why do you like to wear women's clothes" and I said "because I feel comfortable" I said do you like wearing pants" and she said yeah and I said I like wearing a skirt so what can I tell you.

I said I'm not trying to be facetious or anything but I like to feel flowing and you like to be confined, that's you're problem. And there was we would all sit there and sing the songs of the sixties, those were the most beautiful days, and they would come donw and bring us food or they would escort us upstairs so that we could hit the cafeteria.. without fail Marsha was there every morning because I wouldn't leave the premises for the 4 days we were there, Marsha would leave and she would come in 2 times a day "Well, come on girlies, we've got some sandwiches and we've got some coffee and then she come in

early in the morning “well I’ve got the danish and I’ve got the coffee, oh, girl I just turned a trick with this cable guy company and I’ve got us a dozen pies girls we’ll eat pie for days” Oh, it was so funny, It was so lovely and the rapport we had with the students, you know what really hurt GAA? This is where I really add my final thought on this , I remember Jim Owles , Marty Robinson and a couple of the others I guess they thought the press is going to be there and they had their GAA t-shirts turned inside out and that’s when the Lambda was already in and they came in there and they came in there “we’re only here to make sure that you’re all right but we cannot condone this” and I remember telling marty then why the fuck did you bother I said the press is not here having your shirt inside out or the other it doesn’t make any difference . They had it inside out they came in to denounce the sit-in.

MD Why?

SR Cause they felt we were being to radical. That was the whole thing.

MD But they were doing their own zaps.

SR But that was too much because the they didn’t like the idea that the first time the bill was introduced to City Hall and I wasn’t there for that but my friend Bob Kohler was there and there was 2 women from the daughters of Bilitis and that both sat down with bob Kohler they didn’t have no chains but they said they were not leaving here and they were tying themselves with their strings from their sneakers to the table “we’re not leaving we’re chaining ourselves here because there are no street people here , there are no drag queens, to talk about this bill” and they were carted off to jail this was the first GAA presentation of the thing and they didn’t even bother to tell me that it was being presented. The first bill that they presented. This is something that they also stabbed me on the back because I should have been there I was arrested for that bill that’s one thing that I always try to make clear to everybody I say you’ve got that bill in NY passed but you’ve got to remember that I’m the bitch and the only bitch that arrested for that fucking bill two times nobody else fucking worried about it I politically jeopardized my job the first time and my life on 42<sup>nd</sup> street because then there was nobody that was going to protect me and the second time when I climbed the wall of city hall I could have been killed and nobody would have known about because GAA fucked too many people around and they got to remember...

MD Where was Arthur Evans in all that?

SR Arthur Evans you know what, Arthur I love very dearly, I love both Arthurs I know that I was supposed to give Arthur an endorsement for GAA and I agreed to it and I thought about it and in my heart it wasn’t for him and my heart wasn’t for him to have that because Arthur in my heart I know that he would have changed the structure of GAA but I know that they would have always been coming down on him and it wouldn’t have been worth it , I don’t think, maybe I was selfish at that point, they probably would have ridiculed him anyway so I had to think about his political ? in the movement it’s just that I knew where Arthur Evans was coming from and he would have changed it and they would have always thrown it back in his face and the first thing they would have said that even though she’s a GAA member she’s from GLF so what are you try to do? So I had to do a lot of soul searching.

()((((Sylvia goes on about the “nomination” of Arthur Evans)))))))))

SR says Arthur Evans would have done a fabulous job.

SR I discussed it with Marsha (nominating Arthur Evans) even though everybody thinks Marsha's feeble minded well Marsha and I've had lots of political talks and we've settled a lot of things over the table, Marsha travels in her mind and what not, but we've discussed so many things that she's helped me with to analyze instead of me jumping off the gun.

MD That's a nice tribute to Marsha

SR Hey, Marsha's got a good edge, she's, her mind just, her mind just goes.

MD Arthur Bell makes A Evans look like a power grabber.

SR Talks about Arthur Bell breaking up with A Evans and his hostility towards Arthur Evans.

SR Arthur Bell to me was like my little Jewish Yenta mother, oh, she was so sweet, she was an old queen and she was really sweet, I really enjoyed talking to Arthur, I remember I could pick up the phone from anywhere, anywhere, especially around the holidays after I had left the movement I had picked up the phone and he'd say "fucking sylvia your voice if it came from cairo or the depths of the middle of the world I'd know it was you. "I know mom." .... Arthur and I always got along....

SR I remember when we used to live on 2<sup>nd</sup> street I used to have the saints, the candles burning, (Santeria) Marsha and everybody before we'd leave the house, I never pushed it on anybody, I just did my thing and my own bag, but it was like, everybody had to go pay tribute to the saints before they left the house, I didn't force them to do it they felt this was their way of protection and this is something we grow up with and I'm sure white people have their way of expressing themselves and different things I mean people call our religion voo doo but it's really not voo doo because we're only working with the saints I'm only asking for power from my saints I don't do it anymore because I've had a bad experience with them trying to help somebody out but now that I have a big house I'm going to do something and bring back my alter and have I feel that I've had less prosperity since I stopped doing what I really believe in as far as my religion. But there is always something there so believe whatever you believe in as far as who is god, who s elijia, there's only one great person up there and he's the one who watches over all of us and I don't go to church because I don't believe in the church I do believe in the church but I can't go to services and I won't discuss my problems with a priest or anybody but in my heart what I carry... I have friends that believe that the only being is the sun....

MD Do you know about the Radical Fairies and they have all sorts of spiritual rituals...

SR I'm always in the front of the march...

MD The peoples convention and huey

SR The People's Convention that is when Marsha brought me up on charges of depleting the STAR budget.

I took money to go to Washigton, everybody was being represented at that time and we just didn't really have the money and the more I sat there and lingered about it at the alternate U I was like but wait a minute everybody's there why can't we be there I was like every gay group from new york s there and why now....???... fuck it I've got the bank book I'm going to to the bank and get the money so I get the money out of the bank and I go down there... we went down by bus and we hit the bus station down there in



washington and there was people there waiting for people to come in... at that time we were wearing these... one of the brothers' his name was Greg from GLF had crochet's all these little berets like they were open berets like spiderweb berets for all the members of STAR of course mine was all lavender everybody else had lavender and gold and whatnot and red but mine was lavender so as soon as we got off the bus... the person I took with me, I think that's what upset Marsha the most was this boy that I was having an affair with, his name is frank also, like my lover now, or my friend now, but we got off and walked out and we see all these people into gung ho revolution you know and here are two people of the gay movement, everyone of the gay moveent had already drove down or come down in buses, and we are the only two and everybody is straight and I said oh, my god, and....

We walk out of the bus station and ....

Offered a ride in the van to the convention...

Holding on to Frank and panicking....

Joints start passing around....

Taken to a college dormitory... no actually they registered first in a church... lines of people... Syliva's looking for a liquor store...

Registered and went to hear people speaking

Sylvia always carried a knife

Here comes Huey and I'm like "you're huey P newton...???" "You're the Queen from NY but I can't remember your name, you're sylvia, you know that we've accepted you and I said fine, you know we've always given you money for your black panther movement and he says that's why ... Huey P accepted the money STAR sent and Eldridge Cleaver didn't want to accept them ... Huey acknowledged everybody and said that "we all are accepting our brothers and sisters of the gay community as part of the people's revolutionaries convention and they are a part of the revolution. And I sat there and cried while one of his bodyguards grabbed me and held me and I'm like and I said that can you please show me out and how do I go out and get some fresh air.

MD When was all this? That was 1970 I think.

SR that was after Weinstein

MD When all these NY groups went down did GLLF send a contingent

SR GLF sent it's contingent but they didn't have the funds. Marsha and I , Bambi Andora and I sat down and talked about it and we felt that maybe we shouldn't go down there and then after the contingent left we taked about it and Marsha wasn't involved because it came to a conclusion between Bambi, Andora and myself I should go down with somebody we didn't really I don't know why, we could have went down.. we didn't depend on anybody for money, when we went to Albany we had to beg for the money .

MD Why did Marsha bring charges if in fact

SR Because she felt that she wasn't told that I was taking the money.

We had been invited and turned it down and we already knew the ... Marsha we loved but she was already beginning to sway her mind, she didn't know which way she wanted to go, her mind will never be together, but she just you know, and the only reason we did

it was for protection because if we only sent one we were afraid they someone were going to get hurt. Even then we were already feeling sepaarate from them (other gay contingnets).

MD were the charges dropped or what?

SR Oh, well Marsha made the charges they were cleared you know, what happened was I think it was in one of those things you sent me, I paid back the money, I did pay it back. I went out and hustled and I didn't want to hear nothing from nobody.

MD Natasha--- There is a big episode in Arthur's book about the second GAA dance when they wouldn't let ? perform....

SR I can't literally remember who contested it but Natasha wanted to come out lead out with a chain thing

Jean O'Learey thing about woman's issue against the drag queen and the men.

The show didn't go on even after the protests.

"Once I walked into the room with anybody they felt that the queens were going to take over their sancturay."

"they were afraid everytime I opened up my mouth, I just wanted them to know that we were part of their community."

"I want them to see me and every old timer form the movement that sees me "oh, you're still doing your thing."

"I never had any problems in GLF, they backed STAR, they backed me., when they didn't agree with me they told me and I went out and did it on my own."

In GLF "I was more free of talking about life." Free to talk about it.

"I was sylvia, I was ray sylvia, I was a revolutionist, I was giving everything that I felt in my heart that belonged to my community, the whole community not just mine, to my whole community, i didn't want to be put in a hole.."

"One theme brought out STAR, for the simple fact, GAA came in there with their tshirts turned inside out, but they weren't there sanctioning us."

SR diana Davis wrote a book (About Weinstien) with photos of Syliva re the sit-in.

GAA didn't do a fucking thing for Weinstein but GLF did. GAA sponsored the dances at Weinstien but didn't support the sit-in.

### **Tape 02891 Duberman interview with Sylvia 10/14/90**

Ray Jose Christian Rivera Mendoza

SR do not why to be in the war don't believe in wars. Also supplied paperwork from Bellevue and CI saying that she was a homosexual.

MD You said STAR emerged directly from Weistein does that mean what like the next day you started to think about it.

SR "We started to think about it we were staying at the Alternate U

We were actually living there it was funny we used to because the Alt U was the first refu? For a lot of the dancers and they became very open. Everybody always asks what

does the Alternate U mean to you. I always thought of it as Universal Life, we stayed there and used to go down the street and up the street...

I never forget the day that 2 drag queens and 2 boys came up the street from 12<sup>th</sup> street from blimbies with all of their rolls (((((tape just ends here))))))