

MARSHA P. JOHNSON STONEWALL SURVIVOR DIES ONE WEEK
AFTER 1992's GAY PRIDE CELEBRATION

by Randy Wicker

One week & one day after NYC's 1992 Gay Pride celebration, the body of Marsha P. Johnson was pulled from the Hudson River at the foot of Christopher Street.

Marsha, believed to be the first drag queen to have thrown her shoes (hefty size 11^{1/2}s) at the cops raiding the Stonewall Bar, was probably the best-known & most universally-popular gay historical figure in America.

Anatomically a well-built African-American male, "Marsha" used the same gender-inappropriate name whether dressed as a male or female.

"She" was the pronoun of choice even among heterosexuals who knew her personally. Although male, Marsha was a truly feminine persona - a gender-bending one-of-a-kind original.

Exceedingly generous, warm & caring, she would be hilariously funny most of the time but occasionally lapsed into being just outrageously loud & tacky.

Less than 24 hours after her body was found, following a two-phone-call non-investigation of her death, Sixth Pct. Det. James Abrieu declared her mysterious demise a "suicide."

A well known panhandler & street personality on Christopher Street. Black. Gay. HIV positive. On SSI for "Mental disability" & with a West Side Highway transvestite prostitution arrest record dating back to 1962, Marsha P. Johnson - although considered a virtual 'living saint' by thousands - was an unimportant throw-away nonperson in the eyes of the law.

The entire gay community mourned. Heritage of Pride ran a glowing \$400 paid tribute to her in the NY Times obituary column. Over four hundred of her friends celebrated & remembered Marsha's life last July 26th, filling Judson Memorial Church to overflowing. Finally, they marched with a police escort provided by the Mayor's office under a block-wide arch of rainbow balloons down Christopher Street to the very spot where her body had been pulled from the river.

Outraged friends marched on the Sixth Pct. knowing Marsha was incapable of suicide & demanding a real investigation into her death.

In September, an eyewitness came forward & filed a police report describing how a teenage gang of straight drug-dealers - four males & two females - had been physically harassing Marsha, trying to force a joint into her mouth, calling her "faggot" & other names, lifted her into the air so threatenly ^{that} she had asked a nearby policeman busy directing traffic to intervene. All of which took place just a few feet from where Marsha's body had come up from the river's bottom 36 hours later.

After three months of protests, leafletting, tabling & lobbying, by Marsha's friends, and faced with continuing complaints & requests from several city officials : City Councilman Tom Duane, Mayor David Dinkins, City Council President Andrew Stein, ^{and} the gay community's Anti-Violence Project, the NYPD meet with Marsha's brothers & sisters, AVP representative Thomas Duane & myself to reconsider the "suicide" determination.

In a highly unusual action, the NYPD reversed its earlier finding and reclassified Marsha's death as "drowning of unknown cause." Despite this widely acclaimed "Gay Rights Victory," the eyewitness was never shown mug shots to identify Marsha's probable murderers -

who the witness had watched rob & gay bash & who were regular faces down by the river. No effort whatsoever was ever made to find or question them.

The same Sixth Pct. that raided the Stonewall Bar continues to ignore the murder of that beloved noisy drag queen who started a revolution & changed history by throwing her size 11 & 1/2 shoes at them twenty-four years ago.

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(Randy Wicker was Marsha P Johnson's roommate from 1980 until her death last year.)