

# "Can You Spare A Dime for a Dying Queen?"



Photo by Deborah Reinhardt

A memorial tribute was held for Marsha (Malcolm Michaels, Jr.) "P." Johnson on Sunday, July 26th. It was a moving gathering to say farewell to a beloved and colorful fixture in the West Village's gay community: A testament to a caring, courageous and flamboyant person, and to the origins of the Gay Liberation Movement, in which she was an integral force.

Obituaries have appeared in "The New York Native", "The Villager," "The Hoboken Reporter," (where Marsha resided with Randy Wicker for the last several years) and even the New York Times. Her memorial was not an occasion for tears, but a

celebration of her life.

Throughout the 70s and 80s, and until her untimely death, Marsha was a friend to countless numbers of young people who make their way to the West Village and often try to make their lives and livings on its streets. Her panhandling on the streets (always in full drag), saying "Can you spare a dime for a dying queen?", was more often than not because she had just given her last quarter to some kid who needed help. She shared her knowledge of the streets and its potential dangers, and always acted as friend and advisor. She claimed not to be political, but her "in your face" attitude, huge smile,

celebration of her life. Margaret Hill, liaison to the Lesbian and Gay Community, delivered a message from Mayor Dinkins. Members of Marsha's family, fellow Stonewallers and long time friends, shared their memories with the hundreds of friends who filled the church. Marsha's death saddens us all. She will indeed be

unflagging good humor and courage in living her life as she saw fit was a source of strength and courage to countless young people over the past 20 years.

After the church service, a many of the group proceeded to the waterfront at West and Christopher Sts., where her life ended, and Marsha's ashes were committed to the Hudson River. A people's memorial of flowers, candles and incense has been maintained there since shortly after her body was discovered. Afterwards, a street fair and entertainment honoring Marsha was planned outside the Stonewall (once again a bar on Christopher St.), but due to the rain, The Duplex was kind enough to invite everyone inside to their paino bar and to offer half-priced drinks. Marsha's spirit filled the community that day with pride, love.

The life and times of Marsha P. (Pay it no mind!) Johnson are a chronicle of the struggle for gay rights and the mettle of the human spirit. Though we will no longer see Marsha working her way up and down Christopher St., her memory and spirit will live on in the hearts of many and in the recorded history of the gay rights movement. ○