After some discussion, Ray's parents decided that he should visit a psychiatrist. In their rusty red Studebaker pick-up, the family drove to the Medical Center. Ray remembers walking into the book-lined office of Lovell B. Crain. The distinguished doctor stared up from his notes:

> "You're a nice-looking man. What's your problem?"
> "I'm a homosexual."
> "Well, the way you answer it, it doesn't seem to bother you a lot."
> "It don't bother me at all, sir. But my parents are worried about it."
> "I don't have time to waste my energy on people who don't have problems. Send in your parents. They're the one with the problem."

During the next few years Ray experienced life. The naïveté of an East Texas boy turned into the sanguine skepticism of a student radical. While living in New Orleans, for example, he learned the hidden history of homosexuals from two Tulane professors, William S. Woods and Haley Thomas, who had been lovers since World War I. In the midsixties Hill traveled to New York and hung around Columbia University, soaking up socialism from lecturers like Salvador Allende and C. Wright Mills. As antiwar efforts increased, Ray became more militant, staffing a table of homosexual material at a student antiwar conference.

Meanwhile, in 1966 Rita, celebrating her third year with Ricci, opened the Roaring Sixties. "A lot of club owners back then said women couldn't come in if they didn't turn their pants around" or wear dresses, remembers Rita. Two months after her club's opening, Houston's vice squad came to visit. The officers entered around ten in the evening. Separating out the more butch-looking patrons, an Irish sergeant barked out commands. "You get over here. You get over there." Twenty-five lesbians were hauled to jail for wearing clothing of the opposite sex.[1] "The enforcement of the ordinance, of course, was directed only at those people perceived to be gay," underscores Rita. Used for police harassment and extortion, it was also a convenient excuse for some bar owners to restrict lesbians. "Everyone got mad," remembers Rita. "But what could you do?" Rita paid all of the twenty-five-dollar fines and hired an all-girl band, led by "little butch" Sandra, to "pump our business back up."

A month later there was another raid. As in Stonewall, something snapped. "I don't think the other bar owners could see what was happening," swears Rita. However, she "saw the need for someone to speak out on behalf of this community." It was an unjust law that "deprived me of my right to do business."

Wanstrom sought the help of Percy Foreman, whose legal fee matched his status as the preeminent lawyer of the Southwest. Foreman was will-

ing to represent Rita when another raid befell her club. As Rita headed down to the Roaring Sixties that evening to rally folks, "I happened to see a little tumblebug. Now, a little tumblebug will just lay there until somebody turns it over and helps it back on its feet." And so, as the summer of 1967 receded into history, the Tumblebugs were born.

Selling sweatshirts, hosting benefits, and sponsoring drag shows, the dozen or so women who made up the Tumblebugs raised Foreman's $2,500 fee. Skip Arnold, from the Jewell Box Revue in Kansas City, performed as Miss Magnolia Calhoun with his trademark big floppy hat. Mr. Cleo, who performed throughout the South, did his celebrated "Dances that Differ," and Peaches sang her rendition of "My Way."

In challenging the city ordinance, Rita hoped to get "people to think for themselves about what was happening to us and what *we* needed to do to take the heat off." However, Houston had precious little of what might be called a "gay community."[2] Aside from the mostly straight-owned gay bars and the hundred or so "A-list" gay men who hosted the Diana Awards, a parody of the Oscars, there were mostly homosexual closeted individuals, some of whom displayed the southern fondness for eccentricity.

One Diana member operated the Four Seasons on Market Square. "He had a beautiful house on Choclafile Road with a swimming pool on the second floor and live peacocks running on all of these acres of land," discloses Rita. Four bungalows surrounded the house. Here, Rock Hudson and other closeted celebrities would come to party and bring their tricks. Another Houston character was "Bluebeard," who lived in a huge house on Westheimer. "He used to order his wine by the case—gallon jugs of $1.99 white wine," Rita recalls. "He would pour with this gorgeous, tall, green-tinted carafe." As an artist of Styrofoam, "he used to do all the window decorations and all of the backdrops for shows." Bluebeard also had the most extensive pornography collection in the Southwest, which he rented out to other people in the know. "When they raided him and confiscated his collection," Rita laughs, "he was so frightened that he moved to San Francisco!"

Few Houston homosexuals harbored any expectation of organized political activity. Wanstrom declares, "If we'd have had a parade down Westheimer in 1967, we would have been stoned." And many gay men, according to Hill, "saw other people in the community almost as enemies. There was a phenomenon called 'dropping a nickel on a sister.' You'd call someone's employer and tell that he was gay. He'd get fired and you'd make application for the job. We didn't like ourselves. We didn't like one another." "We were," Rita says, "a lost people who needed to come together."

Two nights before New Year's Eve, fate intervened. Sergeant McMenney and his men of the vice squad rushed into the Sixties and found women "dressed in men's pants, men's shirts, and men's shoes."[3] Rita reminisces:

> They lined people up and started questioning. One woman who was asked her occupation said: "I'm a weenie peeler." That just broke everyone up. More cops came in and they made her repeat it: "What do you do?" It turned out that she worked in a meat factory and when the weenies came through she would peel one to make sure it was stuffed right. So they put all of the butches in the paddy wagon.

This time, though, things were different. There was a bevy of "not guilty" pleas. A shocked magistrate stared down at the Tumblebugs as their celebrated attorney asserted: "This will not be a test of the law. . . . It will be a test of the vice squad's concept of the law."[4]

At this time Ray Hill was managing the Plantation Club, a renovated chicken restaurant on West Gray frequented by mostly white men. He also ran a private after-hours club, the Upstairs. After midnight Ray hustled everyone out and reopened with a two-dollar cover that included free soft drinks, coffee, and popcorn. A "better mix" of men and women crowded the dance floor as the corner jukebox played bluesy tunes. Spontaneous jam sessions with local musicians, including Johnny Winters and Janis Joplin, added to the club's popularity.

One February night a film crew parked across West Gray, photographing people coming into and out of the bar. Ray learned that Channel 13 was preparing a film documentary entitled "Houston-Galveston: Sodom and Gomorrah." The next day Ray contacted an "old curmudgeon," Ray Miller, who hosted a late-night talk show on a competing television station. Before Channel 13's exposé was ready to air, "The Last Word" featured a discussion about homosexuality. Debating a Baptist minister, a psychiatrist, and an officer from the Juvenile Department, Hill ably challenged selected biblical readings, psychoanalytic dogma, and other "old chestnuts" like molestation and recruitment.

Rita Wanstrom saw the midnight show. She thought: "Here is somebody that has his mind in the right direction!" David Patterson, a youngster just arrived from Kansas, also caught the TV spectacle. Patterson had traveled throughout the country and was familiar with other bar scenes and nascent homophile groups, including Kansas City's all-male Phoenix Society for Individual Freedom. Organizationally minded, David thought: "Why not a gay organization in Houston?"

At Rita's invitation, Ray and David, who had visited Rita's bar earlier, met her at the Roaring Sixties. Combining their talents, they founded the

Promethean Society, christened after the god Prometheus, who brought fire and light to mortals. While David tailored the society's bylaws from his college fraternity's constitution, Rita worked within the judicial system, and Ray worked behind the scenes. Meanwhile, Foreman reminded the media of the ordinance's silliness, musing that he hoped "the trial would be held during the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo."[5]

In 1968, Mayor Louie Welch frequented George Howgar's bar, the Red Room on Webster Street, with his political cronies, "before queer hours." Following some discussion, Ray was summoned to "come through the back door of City Hall and walk up three flights of stairs to the mayor's office." At the appointed hour, Ray remembers, he climbed the stairs, entered through the fire exit, and met with the mayor's assistant, Larry McKaskle, in a converted maid's closet. Ray wrenched from McKaskle a promise that City Hall would indeed "check into" the lesbian bar raids.

Wearing dresses and makeup, Rita and her "girls" appeared before Judge Raymond Judice. The cases against the eleven were dismissed due to the failure of the vice officers to appear. The sergeant announced that he "definitely intended" to refile charges and to continue to enforce the ordinance.[6] Inexplicably, however, he was transferred to the Narcotics Division. Rita affirms, "They never bothered us again!"

The Promethean Society, however, was less successful than the Tumblebugs in getting "ordinary gay people involved" for its less tangible and more long-term goals. The organizers, as David Patterson recollects, were met with indifference ("I can't come tonight, *Gunsmoke* is on"), and Hill admits there was an absence of continuity and planning among the leaders.

Neither the Tumblebugs nor the Promethean Society was the first gay Texas organization. In 1965, Phil Johnson had invited four friends to his Dallas single-story home for New Year's Eve. For years Phil had been following the progress of the fledgling homophile movement: "I kept praying, 'Dear God, send us a leader in Texas,' Well. I waited and I waited. After twelve years I said, 'Well, Lord. Here I am!'" With "the doors locked and the blinds drawn," the Circle of Friends became "a place for gay people to meet gay people other than a smoke-filled, noisy gay bar. We intended to enlarge this circle by bringing in friends—but *only* friends."

Like Houston, Dallas had a long queer history. There were well-established cruise areas, most notably the corner of Akard and Commerce Streets. A revolving Pegasus (known by locals as the "flying red horse") atop the twenty-nine-story Magnolia Petroleum Building guarded "Maggie's Corner." There was a gay boarding house—the never vacant "Lavender Single" house in the Oak Cliff area—as well as the downtown YMCA and

bars like Tiffany's and Club Reno. The area also had its share of bar raids, police arrests, hustler murderers, and gay parties.[7]

Phil Johnson, the son of a mechanic who had aspired to Broadway, wanted the Circle of Friends to "give depth to the gay movement."[8] Unlike the politically oriented Promethean Society, the Circle's emphasis, however, was social. Activities in 1968, for example, included a Valentine Dinner and a July celebrity bash featuring Tallulah and Salome impersonators. There were also private parties where pictures of physique models were passed around.[9]

Although Rita was familiar with the Circle of Friends, "We didn't have that much contact. I was busy, running my business, organizing." More critically, Ray observes: "We were trying, without knowing how, to do a grass-roots organization. Whereas Dallas's approach was a private club effort."

Both organizations, however, were members of the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations (NACHO)—a loose confederation of mostly East/West Coast associations such as the Mattachine and Daughters of Bilitis groups that had formed in urban pockets since the midfifties. Representing the Circle of Friends, Phil had attended the 1967 New York conference. In August of 1968 Rita, along with Ray Hill, David Patterson, and others, traveled to Chicago to attend the fourth annual conference.

Wearing a conservative suit, high heels, earrings, and "the whole bit," Rita walked into the Trip Restaurant, which served as the conference site. One of the first people she spotted was Barbara Gittings sitting at a long table speaking with others. "She pulls out a pipe and starts smoking. This is something I had never seen!"

The Houston group met activists from throughout the country. Among the seventy-five delegates representing forty organizations were cigar-smoking Foster Gunnison, Jr.; the former government astronomer, Frank Kameny; Shirley Willer, a nurse who once called Chicago home; and the leader of the Student Homophile League at Columbia University, Bob Martin (a k a Stephen Donaldson). "It was a very worthwhile experience," remembers Rita, who was one of only a half-dozen women delegates among the 268 attending. The first thing Ray noticed "was that there was a hostile distrust between East Coast and West Coast," with only a smattering of delegates from the South, including "Ted Brownsword" from the Tidewater Homophile League of Norfolk.

One of the big issues at the five-day conference, chaired by Robert Cromey (the vicar of St. Aiden's Episcopal Church in San Francisco), was

whether to adopt Kameny's resolution, "Gay Is Good."[10] Ray recollects the debating "that lasted for hours." The acrimony and factionalism that characterized these annual conferences were, in Ray's view, "a reflection of something really basic. Gay people didn't like themselves and didn't like or trust one another. Nobody fights more aggressively or with greater vengeance than little churches and small powerless organizations. After they get some semblance of power and some kind of organization that can influence policy then that work is too important to squabble over. But if you can't influence jack shit you spend your time screaming at one another."[11]

The Houston group also came with an agenda: moving the fifth conference to the Space City. "We thought it would be a real feather in our cap," Rita says. "We were going to show the people what we had, what was going on here, and what could be done." To attract delegate votes, she brought a sack full of pins labeled "'69 in Houston" and hosted cocktail parties at her hotel suite. "It was politics, honey!"

Ray, too, was wholeheartedly lobbying for the Houston site: "We needed something going on at home that had a national sound. You bring important people from out of town and the real profit is that it inspires local people. Having all those people coming would have made the Promethean Society seem much more important in the minds of Houstonians. Our growth and organizational development would have moved at a rapid pace." The Houston delegation's enthusiasm was contagious. When it came time to choose the next conference site, Houston was the uncontested choice, with Kansas City selected as a backup.

At the height of their conference success, Rita and Ray received a long-distance telephone call. The vice-president of Promethean had been picked up in the men's room of the Auditorium Hotel! Ray explains: "Where did you find tricks in those days? Toilets in the hotels and in the department stores—and Houston had two very notorious hotels on Texas Avenue: the Milby and the Auditorium. The Auditorium had a dime coin slot on the outside of the main door. It took some time fumbling to get inside. As a result you could hear people coming. You could get into some pretty compromising positions and still have time to recover."

While the arrest did not bother Ray, Rita was white-hot angry. When they returned to Houston, she recalls, "things went to pot." Although Promethean's vice-president resigned, differences between Wanstrom and Hill intensified. Ray remembers being "constantly in a power struggle," while Rita points toward Ray's pushy, blunt, and outspoken style.

In June 1969 Ray responded to an IRS audit. When he was supplying the checkbook requested by an agent to verify the sources for his

income, a warehouse receipt fell onto the desk. Later FBI agents secured a search warrant and soon were cataloguing stolen property at his Memphis "hideaway."

It turned out that Ray Hill was funding antiwar and gay activities through a series of commercial jewel, antique, and art thefts. The self-described Robin Hood "stole primarily for the Glorious Cause, inasmuch as Scarlett O'Hara tossed her wedding ring into the basket of gold to keep the Yankees out of Atlanta."[12] As agents traced more stolen goods to Hill, one arrest led to the next and one bail bond followed another. Rita's patience waned, she says: "I did not want that stigma on the organization." She disassociated herself from the group, refusing to provide any more money. Struggling with his mounting legal problems, Ray also "disengaged" from the society. David Patterson recalls that "by that time the split had become so great that it just collapsed."

Given these tumultuous events, Marc Jeffers, NACHO's Midwest regional chairperson, diplomatically informed members that the 1969 conference had undergone "a sudden eleventh-hour change in plans" due to "difficulties encountered in getting things squared away" and would be moved from Houston to Kansas City.[13] Meanwhile, an exasperated Rita formed the state's first chartered homosexual organization, the Texas Homophile Educational Movement, hoping to contribute to "the education of the homosexual to live in the society that we live in." Within a year, though, the mostly female THEM had become "low-keyed, if it existed at all." Meanwhile, a cluster of gay, Republican-oriented Presbyterians who sought to mainstream the gay movement organized as Integrity.

Despite such setbacks, a new militancy was migrating South. Gay liberation fronts soon popped up in cities from Auburn to Austin, New Orleans to Louisville, Columbia to Richmond, Gainesville to Tallahassee. As NACHO pronounced that "1970 is the year of NEW MILITANCY and NEW ORGANIZATIONS in the movement,"[14] Ray Hill was sentenced to twenty-eight-year concurrent sentences.[15] As a chastened Robin Hood walked into the Diagnostic Unit for the Texas prisons on 2 November 1970, the four-square-mile area near downtown Houston—bounded by the Southwest Freeway, Allen Parkway, and Shepherd and Main Streets—had become "the Westheimer Colony," as police continued their policy of benign neglect.[16] And, as queer southern space expanded, lonely hunters like Rita Wanstrom would be upstaged by rubyfruit rebels.

Stonewall was coming South.