

OutSmart

DECEMBER 1999 - COMPLIMENTARY

Houston's Gay & Lesbian Monthly Magazine

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- **Holiday Gifts Both Tawdry and Tender**
- **HEALTH&SPIRIT: Interview With Gay Warrior John R. Stowe**

Lobo Bookshop and Cafe

Coming out, falling in love, getting arrested on charges of pornography—all in the day of the life of a gay bookseller.

by Ann Walton Sieber

When Larry Lingle opened the first Lobo Bookshop in Dallas in 1973, he wasn't planning on it being a gay bookstore and he wasn't planning on coming out. Lingle was 37, recently divorced, had most recently been a graduate student in history at Texas Christian University, and Lobo sold out-of-date Americana. (No, that's not a code word for anything.)

Well, that didn't last long. The process had begun just six months earlier, when Lingle's wife of eight years had sued for divorce, and Larry realized what had been true all along. ("I mean, how many boys are researching 'homosexuality' in the Sedalia [Missouri] library at the age of 10?") Prepared or not, he started carrying gay material at his bookstore, making Lobo the third gay bookstore in the country, perhaps even the world.

"I opened the bookstore and came out at the same time," Lingle says.

The name "Lobo" has nothing to do with being gay. A colleague's wife suggested the name because she knew Larry loves dogs,



Larry Lingle and his four wild "lobos"—Rupert, Dudley, Winston, and Humphrey.

and "lobo" means "wolf" in Spanish. Larry liked the sound and the associations, so "Lobo" it was.

Now, after 26 years in the gay bookstore business, Lingle has owned gay bookstores in Austin, New Orleans, New York, Okla-

homa City, as well as the Dallas original. He opened the Houston store in 1986, and it has been his home base and most steady support. Lingle's beautiful spacious store on Montrose is one of the most active and high-visibility fixtures in the community.

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Gay History for City Hall

Annise Parker made history as Houston's first gay city council member.

by Tim Brookover

On the first Tuesday of November in 1997, Annise Parker made history with her election as the first openly gay/lesbian public official in Houston. With her victory, Parker joined an exclusive club of the few out political figures across the nation. For years, she had worked toward this win through active service not only in our community, but also in the more mainstream trenches, including the city's notoriously fractious civic associations.

Parker had run unsuccessfully for council twice before. In fact, Parker's tremendous dignity following those losses, displayed on thousands of television sets across Houston, no doubt



helped build goodwill for her third try. Gay-baiting tactics did mar the 1997 campaign—more covert than Louie Welch's shoot-the-queers quip of a decade before, but every bit as repugnant. Still, through her intelligent positions on issues and eyes-on-the-prize determination, Parker created an aura of victory. By the time the local newscasts announced the final counts, the outcome seemed inevitable, logical.

For thousands of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered Houstonians, Parker's election to council instilled a great sense of pride. Then Parker provided another magnificent first, when she was sworn in with life partner, Kathy Hubbard, at her side.

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TIMELINE 1997-98

Each month in 1999, OutSmart presented its timeline series on the past 30 years of Houston gay history. This article concludes the series.

by Tim Brookover

1997 Houston made a dazzling mark with the **first nighttime gay and lesbian pride parade** in North America. Dozens of illuminated floats glided down Westheimer, and the drag queens twinkled even more than usual. Even better, holding the parade after dark allowed participants and spectators to avoid the punishing afternoon heat of June—always an unpleasant factor on parade day, which became a greater problem as many HIV-weakened folks had trouble with the daytime conditions. The annual **Empower** gay-and-lesbian business expo debuted, providing another stage for the community to demonstrate that its ordinary concerns—making and investing money, buying insurance—are much the same as those in the hetero world. Despite a rocky start, Empower, a project of the **Greater Houston Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce**, has grown year to year, attracting more vendors and visitors. Some grumbling was heard about the religious ceremony that capped this year's edition, but Empower will no doubt continue to succeed in the next century. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, DiverseWorks, Rice Media Center, Southwest Alternate Media Project, and Landmark Theatres collaborated on the launch of the first **Houston Gay and Lesbian Film Festival**. The fund benefiting people with AIDS established by the Lady Victoria Lust, the late and definitely great drag queen, was reconstituted as **PWA Holiday Charities**. Since 1987, Lady Victoria had single-handedly run her fund to provide yuletide food and funds for PWAs, raising money most prominently at a yearly Christmas in July bash at Mary's. She died of AIDS-related complications in 1996. The Houston chapter of the **Human Rights Campaign**, the national gay/lesbian advocacy organization, confirmed its fund-raising power by holding the first local Black Tie Dinner, a swanky gala that collected money for the HRC and local groups. **SPECTRUM**, the gay and lesbian employee association at SBC Communications/Southwestern Bell, began promoting awareness among management and staff in Houston of issues affecting gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered employees and worked to eliminate homophobia in the workplace. **G.A.N.G.** (Gay Alumni Noon Group for those over 40) brought together grownups greater than the twink stage.

1998 **Montrose TV**, a valiant effort to produce a weekly magazine-style program, debuts on Access Houston. After several episodes of varying quality, the program expired for lack of financial support. The Hollyfield Foundation, established four years earlier, opens its historic Montrose building as the **Hollyfield Conference Center**, providing meeting rooms and rental office space at low cost or no cost to community organizations. Undaunted by failed previous efforts to launch a community center in the city, another hardy group of individuals opened the **Houston Lesbian & Gay Community Center** in the digs of the former Montrose Clinic in the heart of Montrose. The two-story center serves as a meeting space for activities that include men's and women's coming-out groups, a weekly writers group, and a lesbian movie night, and provides offices for organizations, among them the Houston Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus. **Stonewall Democrats**, the local chapter of the national gay/lesbian organization that supports Democratic candidates and office holders, organized in Houston. Another political group, **Gold PAC**, was established. Houston mayor Lee Brown appointed the first gay community liaison to his office, **Matthew Eastus**. As important as that position sounds, an extensive search of the city website turns up no mention of the liaison office or its occupant. At the end of a century filled with many triumphs for our community, apparently all places at the table are not created equal.



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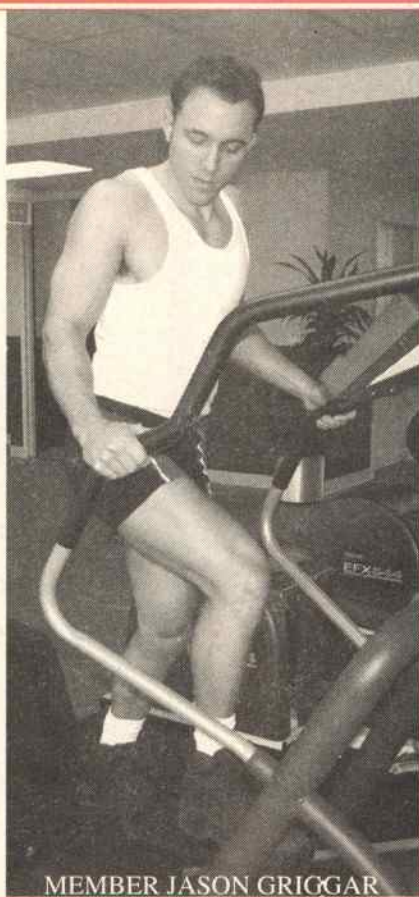
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Annise Parker

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Julie Mason, the *Houston Chronicle* political writer, recently recalled that race. "I don't think it was a foregone conclusion," Mason said. "She had a very well-organized opponent with a large base of support. But Annise had run before, and with each loss she seemed to build a little momentum."

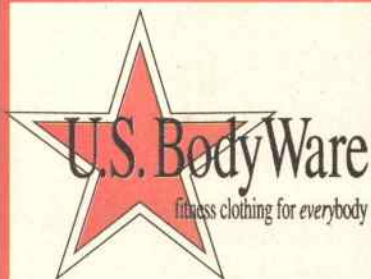
Mason said that some City Hall denizens were initially concerned about what Parker would do once in office. "She immediately proved herself to be much more than a single-issue candidate," Mason said. "She has also completely nullified the lesbian issue." Parker achieved the latter victory simply by living completely, and without fanfare, out.

As those who have worked with Parker in the gay/lesbian community know, she quietly commands admiration. Mason confirmed that that quality transferred to government. "Around City Hall, she is considered one of the smartest members. Other council members follow her lead," Mason said.

Parker serves on seven City Council committees, including those concerned with environmental concerns and health, ethics, and parks. She chairs the Port of Houston committee and the alley subcommittee of the neighborhood planning and protection committee. She represents Houston on a public-private alliance promoting the projected Interstate 69 Canada-to-Mexico highway and at meetings of a partnership of international cities that are centers of energy production.

"I think toward the second half of her first term, she was keeping her own counsel," Mason observed. "She is very independent. She doesn't just follow the lead of the mayor, much to the consternation of the Brown administration. She has her own clout now. I think we will see more of that in her second term."

Term limits will prohibit Parker from running for council again. According to Mason, we will continue to see more of Parker. "I think she has her eye on the controller's office," Mason said. When called for a response, Parker's media staffer, Cicely Wynne, replied that Parker only looked forward to serving her current term and "plans to continue in public service in some way." No doubt there are few political limits for Parker. After all, in San Francisco openly gay supervisor Tom Ammiano, a long-time community activist and former stand-up comic, is in a runoff for mayor. ▼



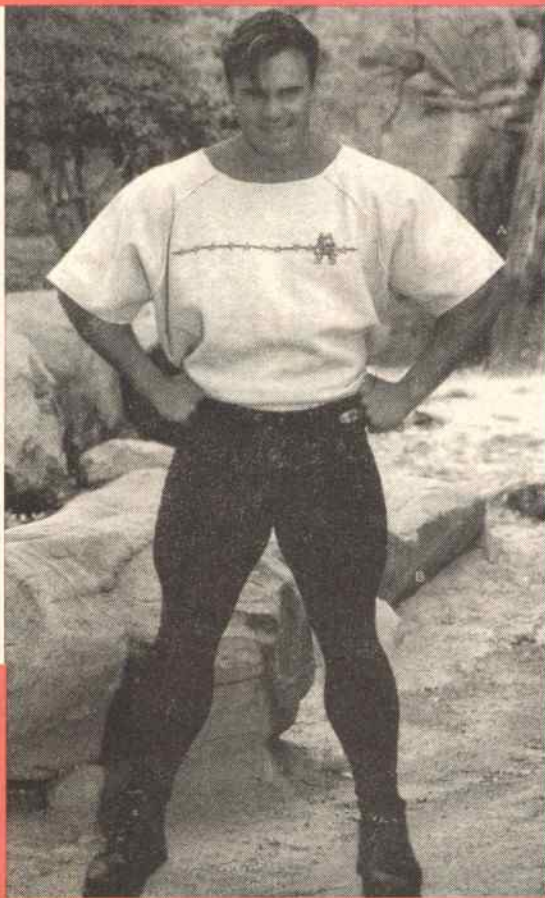
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Lobo Bookshop

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"I think Larry has to be commended and other early bookstore owners," says Gene Harrington, a prominent leader and organizer in the gay community. "When they came into being, they opened up a major part of our culture. And not just to us, but to the community at large. It's an act of liberation and an act of liberation that we at the turn of the century take for granted. And that act of liberation took a lot of courage."

When Lingle opened up the first Lobo, finding gay authors and books on gay issues was not easy. It was just a word-of-mouth proposition, hearing about a book from a friend, trying to track it down through the publisher or through an out-of-state gay bookstore.

"It is important, especially for young people in our community to realize," Harrington says, "that gay and lesbian bookstores in general and Lobo in particular used to be our *only* source of gay and lesbian literature. If you wanted a book by a gay author or on a gay issue, you either went to a store like Lobo, or you didn't get it."

The bookstore has played a pivotal role in the coming-out stories of many a customer through the years. Lingle remembers back in 1977 in Dallas, a high school senior who shyly ventured into the store. It was like an awakening for the young man. "It was a way of acknowledging and verifying it," Lingle recalls. "He was Hispanic, Catholic, came from a very tight family. Kids back then thought they were the only one...."

Even today, the bookstore fulfills an important role in the community, a place besides the bars where someone can walk in and feel at home. A lot of people come to the door of the bookstore and don't even come in, Lingle says.

"If there had been a place like this in existence, believe me, I wouldn't have waited till I was 37 to come out."

Not only did Lingle use his bookstore to come out himself, but it was where he met his partner in both business and passion, Bill White, "the love of my life."

"In 1978, a young man walked into my store, and was introduced to me—he was 21, I was 41—and it lasted for 18 years. He

died in 1995. November 8," Lingle says. His eyes grow momentarily shiny. "It still hits home. He was delightful. I was very mental, while he was emotional, creative. He was always the spur that kept things moving."

When Larry and Bill opened their Houston store in 1986, it was definitely one of those "for better or worse" years.

"It is important, especially for young people in our community to realize, that gay and lesbian bookstores in general and Lobo in particular used to be our *only* source of gay and lesbian literature. If you wanted a book by a gay author or on a gay issue, you either went to a store like Lobo, or you didn't get it." —Gene Harrington

Larry was holding down the fort in Dallas. In April, Bill went to New Orleans to oversee the opening of the Decatur Street Bookshop in the French Quarter. In June, the vice squad burst in the front door of the Dallas store and arrested Larry for selling dildos.

Texas is the only state in the vicinity with laws against dildos. "We aren't worried about guns in Texas," Lingle says, "but you can't sell a concealed dildo." But even with Texas' arcane laws, usually stores could expect several citations before any action was taken. "In Dallas everyone was selling dildos," Lingle says. "They were a good profit item."



Larry (right) with his partner Bill White and close friend Kim Brinster in 1992.

But that year, a new prosecutor had been elected who ran on a plank to wipe out pornography, "and when he got in office, he meant it."

However, this tough guy prosecutor's first appointee turned out to be one of Larry's customers—"which means he was

not only into pornography, but that he was queer," Lingle says.

The Dallas raid and Larry's arrest was in June; then in September, the store in New Orleans was raided and Bill was arrested on 23 felony counts of pornography. According to Larry, the reason they were hit was because they had unwittingly hired a gay lawyer who was too principled to make the customary payoffs. The deal they struck was that Bill got his freedom and a clear record, and they closed the New Orleans bookshop. Bill loaded the store's contents into a truck and headed for Houston, where the partners used the merchandise to open up their most successful store, and the one that felt most like "home."

Larry and Bill opened the Houston store in 1986, and moved to Houston in 1988. After all the vice-squad excitement, the idea was to lay low, just be quiet booksellers. But Larry and Bill weren't very good at staying quiet.

"It was an election year," Larry remembers, "and I just can't be quiet during an election."

Larry took out a series of ads in the inside front page of the *Montrose Voice* that included political editorials and commentary on the community. The Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus gave the store an award in recognition of the ads, and Gene Harrington and Sue Lovell persuaded Larry and Bill to get involved in the caucus. Jay Hollyfield also got them involved in the first Black Tie Dinner held in 1988 in the cellar of Tony's restaurant. "Bill liked to give parties," Larry says. For two years, Bill was co-chair of the dinners. After Hollyfield died, he asked in his will that both men be on the board of the Hollyfield Foundation; the board elected Bill as their chairman.

"We were floored to be so accepted in Houston," Larry says. "Up in Dallas we were thought of as quote unquote pornographers."

The first Houston Lobo location was a two-story store on Westheimer, with a side entrance off the shopping strip across from what's now the Rainbow Club. After 10 years, Lobo outgrew that location, and Larry and Bill started looking around for a place to move. Larry often ate breakfast at Charlie's, and he had his eye on a retail space across the street in the Tower Theater complex. However, he was caught up with

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Marcus, but there is a way of deriving the same benefits with a lot less "drama." First, sit or lie down comfortably. Start from one point in your body—your right foot, for example—and contract (tighten) the muscles there. Hold this contraction for a count of three, and then gently and completely release it. From there, move up toward the muscles in your lower leg, then upper leg, then trunk, then shoulders, then arms (I think you get the picture). Once you've gone through all your body parts, do one more contraction. Only this time tighten your entire body (every muscle), hold for a count of three, and then gently release. Feel the tension leave as you release your contracted muscles, then try the deep-breathing technique previously described.

MEDITATION

Sometimes it's tough to find time for this technique, but when practiced regularly, it is highly beneficial. First, find a quiet spot where you will not be interrupted or intruded upon. Close your eyes, relax your muscles, take a few deep breaths, and then focus your imagination on something. Let's say you're imagining a rose. Focus on the flower and how it feels. What does it look like? Smell like? Imagine every aspect of it as though you were actually holding the flower in your hands. As you do this, you will inevitably be challenged with

all sorts of distractions in your mind (everything from work to what's on TV tonight). Your mission is to focus entirely on your rose. Shut out everything that is outside of you, as well as the distractions of your inner mind, and continually bring your concentration back to the focus you've selected. It's not as easy as it sounds, and it does take practice, but this type of technique can be extremely rewarding.

This season (or any season for that matter) doesn't have to be a nightmare. Stress can be managed, and you can be left with the freedom to actually enjoy your life without having to take it too seriously! Above all, learn to find the humor in difficult situations. A good laugh can dispel even the most disconcerting of situations, as long as they are not at the expense of another individual. And, as always, rely on your spiritual beliefs to help you keep things in perspective.

John-Aaron is a nationally certified personal trainer, member of the International Assoc. of Fitness Professionals, and owner of Muscle Mechanics, a personal fitness training and nutritional guidance facility. He can be reached at Musclemech@aol.com.

Lobo Bookshop

continued from p.21

taking care of Bill, who was in the final weeks of his struggle with AIDS. Soon after Bill died, Larry found out that the space had been secured by Crossroads Market, continuing a competition that went back to Dallas, where both stores originated.

Other Lobo stores came and went. In 1994, Larry opened a store in Austin, and sold it in 1998. He ran a store in Oklahoma City for one year, in 1993. ("A friend asked me to open up a store in his shopping complex. I said a gay bookstore would never fly in Oklahoma City, and I was right.") He sold the Dallas store in 1990. (It has since gone under.)

Soon after Bill died, Larry learned that the oldest gay bookstore in the world, the Oscar Wilde Bookshop in New York City, founded in 1968, was in danger of closing down permanently. The bookstore was so controversial when it opened that it still sports the nonbreakable Plexiglas windows, installed to guard against rock throwers. Lingle bought the gay landmark in 1996. "I love New York, and I didn't want to see this historic bookshop fade out of existence." Sadly, the small bookstore had been so neglected that the only salvageable commodity were the books.

For a manager, Lingle brought in his close friend, Kim Brinster. Bill and Larry had met Kim in 1988 when they were in New York for Gay Pride week. A woman handed them a flyer about the AIDS quilt, and then came running after them. "You look familiar," she said to Bill. Turned out they'd attended high school together in Harlingen, Texas. Kim became one of their closest friends; when Bill got sick, she quit her job and parted from her lover in order to come to Houston to help out. Kim took on the job of running the Oscar Wilde, even hiring a lesbian carpenter friend to custom-make bookshelves with inlaid rainbow triangles.

Lobo and Oscar Wilde are now Larry's only bookstores. Because the New York store is still losing money, Lobo has to support it. In 1998, the total sales of the two bookstores was \$2 million, although Larry stresses that the net profit is much less, bookstores having notoriously low margins of profit.

Lobo Bookshop contains two distinct different genres: the varied literary collection up front, and the "adult" video collection in the back room of the store. "Some women have problems with the adult material we carry," Lingle says. "But I've never apologized. I think it's part of our community. I'm certainly not the only gay bookstore in the country to carry it."

Lesbian authors and issues are amply represented, in "Women's Fiction," "Women's Studies," "Women, General" sections, as well as integrated throughout the store in sections such as "Relationships" and "Gay Studies." In addition to the sizable adult video collection, Lobo also has over 1,000 non-pornographic videos—"theatrical," as Lingle calls them. His favorite is *Maurice*, an English drama based on an E.M. Forester book about two Oxford students who fall in love. (Full frontal nudity of Hugh Grant and Rupert Graves!)

Many of Lobo's staff have had a long tenure at Lobo and other gay bookstores, such as manager Blake White, who worked at the Austin store before coming to Houston, and assistant manager Sally Woods, who orders all the women's titles and used to be at Inklings.

Although Lobo has all the beautiful new bookshelves and spacious display of a standard upscale bookshop, looking around the store, you get the feel of a deep-running connection with gay culture that goes beyond stocking the latest releases or trendy rainbow keychain. The café is stocked with used books, which you can read in the comfy armchairs. Lobo also carries a huge selection of out-of-print gay books—way too many to all be on display.

But most intriguing are the celebrity photographs and letters, which Lingle has been collecting for more than 30 years. Like a 1906 signed photo of Sarah Bernhardt. In separate letters, both W.H. Auden and Tennessee Williams trying to persuade young men to keep them company. (Both were unsuccessful.) A 1949 letter and photo from the early tennis pro Bill Tilden written from prison, where he was imprisoned for sodomy, giving tennis advice to a close friend. ("If you meet George Evens *do not lob* much and then only at the unexpected moment.")

Larry guesses that he's currently the oldest gay bookseller in the business. It hasn't been easy since Bill died, four years ago. Larry has become a bit of a recluse, he admits, and last year his beautiful Montrose house burned, and he lost all of his personal library. His oldest cat died in the fire, but Larry's very thankful that his four precious basset hounds were able to get out.

It's been a long crazy journey. Lingle remembers way back in the '60s reading an article about the Oscar Wilde Bookshop.

"I was amazed that there was a gay bookstore. I thought this guy must be incredibly brave." Little did he know.

Lobo Bookshop and Cafe is located at 3939 Montrose, 713/522-5156. Hours are seven days a week, 9 a.m.-midnight.

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Happy Birthday and Thank You

25 years of political activism at the Houston Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus

by Clarence Burton Bagby

In June of 1975, four people came together to found what would become the oldest gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender civil rights organization in the South. They called it the Gay Political Caucus. It's difficult to fathom that there were only those four: Pokey Anderson, Bill Buie, Hugh Crell, and Keith McGee. Even in 1975, few activists in Houston would speak out publicly for fear of losing their jobs and their apartments. People were still being fired for being gay and lesbian, and it was still illegal in Houston for people to dress in the clothing of the opposite sex. The law even banned women from wearing fly-front pants.

Now called the Houston Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus, the caucus is celebrating 25 years of political organizing, a birthday on which it can proudly claim credit for the rise of the gay and lesbian community in Houston as an effective political block.

Just like the caucus itself, the founding four were not just flashes in the pan by any means. Anderson went on to serve on the national board of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force a few years later, and McGee was to play a leadership role with the Human Rights Campaign Fund. Crell stayed

involved with the caucus until his death, and Buie is still a member.

Ray Hill was also an early prime mover in the caucus. When the GPC was founded, Hill had already been out of the closet for almost a decade and was actively campaigning for gay civil rights in Houston and against the prevailing public concept of homosexuality

of Americans believed homosexuals should have equal rights in terms of job opportunities, according to the NGLTF Policy Institute. Only 27 percent of Americans favored hiring homosexuals as elementary school teachers.

"By 1975 we had come a long way, but still had a long way to go," said the late Gary Van

Ooteghem in an interview a few years ago. Van Ooteghem was the first president of the caucus and later served as co-chair of the NGLTF national board. At the urging of NGLTF, United States Rep. Bella Abzug had just introduced the first gay rights bill in the U.S. Congress.

Back in Texas, state Rep. Craig Washington was being ridiculed on the floor of the Texas House of Representatives for his efforts to eliminate the homosexual sodomy law, Section 21.06 of the Texas Penal Code. After hearing of the raucous anti-homo-

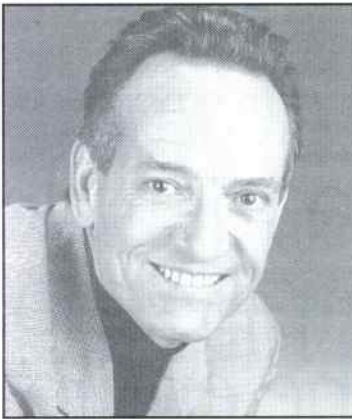
sexual debate, Anderson met with a group of friends in her Montrose apartment and laid plans for the creation of the GPC.

So on a bright summer day in June 1975, media representatives gathered for a press conference. Four of Houston's leading homosexuals, Anderson and Hill, along with Jerry Miller and Rev. Robert Falls, announced the formation of the GPC under the blazing light



We've come a long way, baby:
L-r: Rev. Robert Falls (MCCR), Ray Hill, Jerry Miller, Pokey Anderson

as an illness. Only two years earlier, in 1973, the newly founded National Gay Task Force (later to become NGLTF) had successfully worked to change the American Psychiatric Association classification of homosexuality as a mental illness. Two-thirds of Americans in 1975 still said they believed that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex was always wrong, although a little over half



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of public scrutiny. Miller represented Integrity, Houston's most effective homosexual organization to date. Rev. Falls represented the alternative religious community as pastor of the newly formed Metropolitan Community Church of the Resurrection (now Resurrection MCC). Anderson represented Houston lesbians.

Hill, recently out of prison on a burglary conviction, represented no one in particular, but helped by lending his name recognition to the event. In his usual blunt manner, Hill said at the time, "Up until now, I was the only faggot with a face and name in town." This was indeed true, as for years Hill had been the only person willing to speak on record to the media and to advocate publicly for equal treatment of gays.

Miller quietly pointed out the changing times by stating, "In the '60s, if you were gay, you were a political radical. The community is more broad-based now."

The GPC's first candidate questionnaire included questions about the introduction of state legislation to outlaw employment discrim-

After hearing of the raucous anti-homosexual debate around the sodomy law, Pokey Anderson met with a group of friends in her Montrose apartment and laid plans for the creation of the Gay Political Caucus.

ination against gays and lesbians, repeal Section 21.06, and give gay and lesbian couples the right to file joint income tax returns.

Van Ooteghem didn't know the folks who had called the press conference and was in Washington, D.C., meeting with Leonard Matlovich at the time. Matlovich, an Air Force sergeant and Vietnam veteran who had received the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart, had voluntarily declared his homosexuality to his supervising officer and resisted discharge under an exclusion clause that allowed "outstanding" homosexuals to remain in the Air Force.

Van Ooteghem, then the Harris County Comptroller of the Currency, admired Matlovich's courage and later said, "Leonard Matlovich was my role model, and I hope I can be someone else's."

So, upon returning to Houston, Van Ooteghem told his boss Harsell Gray, Harris County treasurer, that he was planning to appear before Commissioners' Court to urge them to pass regulations protecting the civil rights of gays and lesbians. Gray told him that appointed personnel were not allowed to engage in political activities during business hours and asked him to sign a letter acknowledging these instructions. When Van Ooteghem refused, Gray fired him. "GVO," as he became known in the community, later said that Gray's stated reason for his firing was simply a cover for the real reason: Gray was afraid Commissioners' Court would cut his budget for having a highly paid homosexual on his staff.

So the next day, August 1, 1975, Van Ooteghem addressed Commissioners' Court, professing his own homosexuality and proposing a civil rights resolution. Less than a month later, he filed suit against the county for unfair dismissal. His suit was eventually successful and he received back pay.

"Gary has this great, high-paying job and was willing to sacrifice it to advance the cause," Hill said. "Because of his celebrity, we

recruited Gary to be the first president of the caucus."

In the following years, the caucus started to mature organizationally and to gain political clout as well. Mickey Leland, who as a state representative had supported Washington's 1975 effort to repeal Section 21.06, thanked the caucus for helping him win election to Barbara Jordan's congressional seat in 1978. Leland included the names of Hill, Steve Shiflett (caucus president), and Van Ooteghem in his newspaper advertisements. Mayor Jim McConn said at the time, "I think it [the gay and lesbian community] is becoming a viable political force."

The caucus became and remains the community's chief advocate with the police department. In 1978, Shiflett appeared before Houston City Council to protest that no one from the gay community had been appointed to serve on the newly created Houston Police Advisory Board. Later that year the committee was increased in size from 15 to 21, and Mayor McConn telephoned Shiflett for a recommendation. McConn agreed to Shiflett's recommendation of Patricia O'Kane and, as alternate, Rev. Chuck Larsen, pastor of MCCR.

When the group was reconstituted in 1986, Annis Parker (caucus president), working with then Police Chief Lee Brown and Mayor Kathy Whitmire, succeeded in gaining the caucus a permanent seat on the Houston Police Advisory Committee, a seat that the caucus retains to this day.

According to Hill, in 1984, Jerry Mays, Jack Jackson, and Shiflett offered a resolution at a caucus meeting to support City Council passage of an ordinance banning city employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. "The resolution never came to a vote because it was clear that we [the opponents] probably had the votes to defeat it," Hill said. "So in those reconciliatory times of the caucus, the resolution was tabled indefinitely." HGLPC had initially discussed at great length the idea of asking City Council for an ordinance. "I, among others, was really concerned, with AIDS over the horizon, that it would result in a referendum and that they would beat us to death with the 'gay plague' offense," said Hill. Mays, Marion Coleman (later a caucus trustee) and others had organized Community Political Action Committee (C-PAC) because of dissatisfaction with the caucus. As part of the payback for C-PAC's support, City Council member Anthony Hall (the caucus had endorsed his opponent) sponsored the ordinance banning city employment discrimination. "The caucus was in a political box canyon," explains Hill. "Unable to oppose the ordinance, we dispatched Sue Lovell, caucus president, to City Hall to work on getting the votes, because Mayor Whitmire would not move forward without caucus support as well as assurance of a significant majority of the votes on Council.

"Members of the Klu Klux Klan and Black Ministers Association were outside City Hall arm-in-arm singing 'We Shall Overcome,'" said Hill. "It was quite a sight." Conservative Republican Steven Hotze made his political debut in Houston working for a referendum to repeal the ordinance. Holtze's group obtained the required signatures a month before the deadline.

Jerry Smith, then Houston city attorney, now a Reagan appointee to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, wrote wording that was intentionally confusing, according to several people involved at the time. It was easy to be confused: If you were for gay rights, were you supposed to be *for* the referendum or *against* it? Caucus-endorsed Democratic candidates were major contributors to the pro-referendum forces. "When the caucus appointed a Baptist minister from Beaumont to run the anti-referendum campaign, I was told to shut up and stay out of sight," said Hill. The only other item on the ballot was a Spring Branch school district vote, and so a large portion of the vote came from Spring Branch. Although the anti-gay referendum

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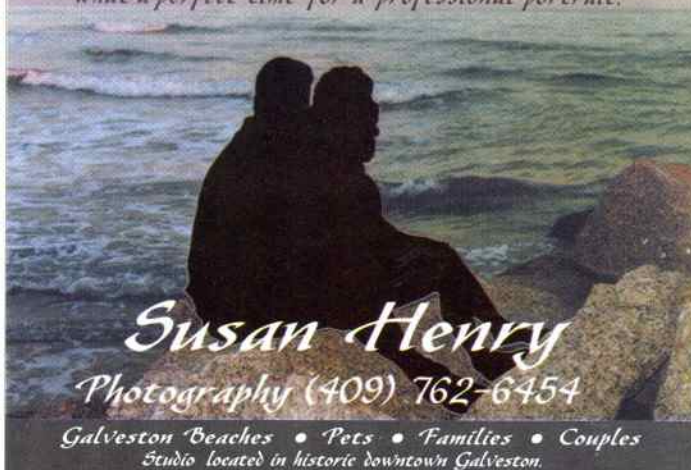
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was defeated in all Montrose precincts and in several Third Ward precincts, still passed overwhelmingly. "It buried any illusion that the caucus had any discipline or strength to get out the vote at that time," said Hill.

Hill says he and Annise Parker opposed Lovell's re-election; Hill campaigned for president on the platform of a major activist

anybody to office. "So it was tit for tat, with the queers losing early in 1985 and the anti-queers losing later in the November 1985 city election," says Hill.

Parker was victorious in her 1986 bid for the caucus presidency and served two terms; she remains the only caucus president to have completed two consecutive terms as

In 1978, Mayor Jim McConn said, "I think it [the gay and lesbian community] is becoming a viable political force."

initiative, Parker campaigned for a "lay-low and blend in" strategy, and Lovell ran to continue the status quo and give her a chance to redeem herself. "That was the election where nobody [no political candidates] came," says Hill. City Council member Eleanor Tinsley was the only opposed City Council candidate to screen for endorsement with the caucus in 1985. The caucus endorsed Council members Ernest McGowen Sr. and Judson Robinson Jr. over their own objections. The Straight Slate—headed by Hotze and Ed Young, Second Baptist Church pastor—did not elect

president.

Hill ran successfully for caucus president in 1989 on the platform that the caucus needed a revival. "We boycotted Randall's Food Markets, who finally agreed to a written nondiscrimination policy in company employment," Hill says. "Caucus membership doubled; it was a very busy year."

For the caucus, the 1990s were filled with AIDS education efforts, while scores of members were lost to the disease.

After acrimonious battles over bisexual and transgender inclusion, the first trans-

gender board member was appointed by the president in 1998, and a process was begun to change the mission statement so that it would be inclusive of the entire gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community. Two transgenders and one bisexual currently serve on the caucus board of trustees.

The Caucus Political Action Committee has endorsed 32 candidates for the upcoming November 7 election, a far cry from 1985's handful. Mayors and congresspeople now come to the Caucus PAC to interview for consideration for endorsement by the organization.

Twenty-five years later, the caucus remains a strong force working for freedom, justice, and equality as part of a broader social justice movement. For information, call 713/521-1000 or see www.hglpc.org.

Clarence Burton Bagby is a native Houstonian active in civic and political affairs, locally as well as nationally. He serves on the national executive board of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the Houston Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus board of trustees. He was president of the caucus in 1998 after serving as a caucus trustee for two years. He is the executive director of the Old West End Association.

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Our Queer Southern Heritage

Remembering and recording
tales of gay Houston in the '60s and '70s

by Jim Sears

Photo by Greg Day

Houston 1967 The Tumblebugs Take on City Hall

Tape measures and pencils crowded her pockets. Tools hung over her left shoulder. Rita Wanstrom trudged upstairs. It had been one of Houston's insufferable summer days when even the hardiest workers found themselves frequenting the five-gallon bucket of ice and lemons. . . .

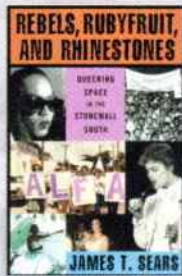
Inside the apartment [she shared with her partner, Ricci Cortez], Rita kicked off her boots and rested for a spell. Rita had been setting up and serving drinks at the Roaring Sixties for three years. It had become a "family" operation. Peaches, who was known for his flawless interpretation of "My Way," choreographed the drag queens. Leo, who could rise from alto to soprano in a single

refrain, bartended. And Ricci, who flawlessly stripped, held court while Rita greeted guests beneath her oil portrait.

Known as the homosexual playground of the South, Houston was already home to a dozen gay bars and clubs when the Roaring Sixties opened on June 23, 1967. Unlike Mafia-controlled bars of many Northern cities, gay clubs in "Space City" were often

“Southern history is never simple and seldom straight,”

writes Jim Sears in his introduction to *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South*. A professor at the University of South Carolina, Sears is slowly and thoroughly documenting all that is lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered in the South. Published in August 2001 by Rutgers University Press, *RRR* is the second in a



multi-volume series in which Sears intends to portray the whole chronologic sweep of queer Southern history, woven from the stories of people who lived it. Many of Sears's stories are from Houston, which he dubs the “San Francisco of the South.” We present here excerpts from *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*.

owned by straight women. There was Effie's Pink Elephant (which had been around since the '40s), catering to older gay men; Verlon's Surf Lounge; the Round Table on Westheimer, owned by Dorothy; Rocky's, a hole-in-the-wall working-class club on West Dallas; and the Desert Room, whose famed Sunday afternoon tea dances were guarded by Hazel with a watchful eye for the police and an agile thumb

set to flicker the lights.

With its checkered tablecloths, crimson drapes, and ruby walls, the Roaring Sixties was a place that a lot of folks called home. . . . In addition to lesbian regulars like Dee Dee, who'd waltz in with slacks, cuffs turned up, hair slicked back, and tanned Mexican shoes, there was a one-armed guy who'd shoot pool with Rita for \$20 a ball. Rita used one of her

matched pair of San Toeos; he used the end of a broomstick—and “cleared the table.”

Rita awakened as Ricci gently removed her pocket tools. “It's okay, Poppa Bear. Just go back to sleep. I'll set up for tonight's crowd.”

In 1967 Rita, celebrating her fourth 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. . . . 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. "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 \$25 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 out the help of Percy Foreman, whose legal fee matched his status as the preeminent lawyer of the Southwest. Foreman was willing 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 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. . . . 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." 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 [for which Rita designed some of the costumes], 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 Choclafle Road with a swimming pool



ALL PHOTOS USED WITH PERMISSION OF RITA WANSTROM

SCENES FROM THE ROARING SIXTIES: Second from top is Rita Wanstrom (right) with her darling Ricci.

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. . . .

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. . . . We were," Rita continues, "a lost people who needed to come together."

Two nights before New Year's Eve, a sergeant 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."

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. 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. Amidst 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."

Meanwhile, pugnacious activist Ray Hill worked for change behind the scene. . . . 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 climbing the stairs, entering through the fire exit, and meeting 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.

On the day of the trial, Rita and her "girls"—wearing dresses and makeup—appeared before Judge Raymond Justice. The cases against the 11 were dismissed due to the failure of the vice officers to appear. The sergeant, however, announced that he "definitely intended" to refile charges and to continue to enforce the ordinance. Inexplicably, however, he was transferred to the Narcotics Division. Rita affirms, "They never bothered us again!" →



© GREG DAY PHOTO 2001

DIVASWITHATTITUDE The heroes for midseventies Southerners were not gay liberationists with queer placards and clenched fists but heroines adorned with rouge and rhinestones. Homosexual citizens of Atlanta, New Orleans, Houston, Miami, and Dallas had long enjoyed such shows. . . . Southern drag queens did more than imitate Vivien Leigh; they stood resolute against the ravaging of their homosexual Taras. As in Stonewall, divas with attitude were the vanguard for the gay freedom movement. North Carolina's Brandy Alexander first started doing drag as a Sarasota student in 1964. Refusing to be intimidated by police bullying, she was frequently "pulled out of the bars and beaten by the cops with billy clubs." Atlanta's legendary "jailhouse Jezebel," Diamond Lil, earned her moniker following a raid of a "masquerade" party held in a Savannah "dungeon" operated by "Cousin Cora"—herself known for assembling South Georgia's best rough trade, aristocratic closet belles, and top drawer entertainers. And in Tidewater, longtime activist "Diana Ross" mounted a court challenge to her police abduction from the local Steak 'N' Egg. —from *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPH "Africa" (Brian Seabrooks) was elected Ms. Gay Charleston, South Carolina, by popular vote in 1979. It was the 20th Annual Ms. Gay Charleston Pageant. He is the first African American to hold this highly esteemed position. His performance was brilliant and he won the hearts of all Charleston's queer citizens both black and white. Only 19 years old at the time, he was soon discovered by talent agents and left Charleston to perform at the Sweet Gum Head in Atlanta. On the night of the pageant, former Ms. Gay Charllestons, some going back 20 years, sat at a long greeting table at the entrance. Many had bouffant-teased hair from the '60s. They were in a tizzy, upset with the prospect of having a person of color become Ms. Gay Charleston. Fortunately, their prejudice was not shared by the majority of the folks present! —photographer Greg Day

1973-74
Seventy-Five Lesbians

Put someone else's name down!" read the sign-in sheet.

Scribbling "Pokey," the five-foot-three social science major, recently arrived from college in Florida, walked into Just Marion & Lynn's. Wearing a pleated skirt, her brown hair trailing to her waist, Pokey Anderson stepped up to the bar and ordered a ginger ale. The bartender winced, as if to ask, "Do you know where you are?"

Identifying herself as a feminist and a lesbian, Pokey was neither a separatist nor "out" in early '70s Houston. . . . While living in suburbia, Pokey occasionally sneaked downtown to walk along "Peculiar Street" in the Westheimer Colony. Houston was "on the cusp of change from the bar lesbian to the lesbian-feminist," Pokey explains.

The lesbianscape was a set of loosely networked communities of women. . . . Not-so-closeted lesbians played fast-pitch softball at Memorial Park and relished the annual International Softball tournament at summer's end. Meanwhile, the "A-List Lesbians" enjoyed outings like Easter egg hunts on Lake Japhet and Halloween parties. . . . Most, like those frequenting the Roaring



SCENES FROM THE SEVENTIES: Pokey Anderson (second from left) joins in the first March on Washington, Oct. 14, 1978. Inset: Montrose Gaze Community Center, 1973.



Sixties or Just Marion and Lynn's, "had lived this existence in the closet for all of these years reciting the mantra 'If you don't rock the boat, you'll be okay.'" But, a new lesbian wave, generally unaware of an earlier generation of activists like Rita Wanstrom and her Tumblebugs, was about to tip the boat of Houston heterodoxy. . . .

As 1973 began, Pokey attended the first National Women's Political Caucus convention held at the Rice Hotel. "Sissy

Farenthold, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem were all there—right in front of me!" exclaims Pokey. But the caucus was "very straight, although there were people in the closet"—including Pokey—who "kept sneaking off" to a sexual orientation workshop on the top floor. There she learned about the Montrose Gaze Community Center that had officially opened three months earlier, inspired by the Dallas gay pride parade that past June.

A few days later, Pokey parked her VW bug near the corner of Fairview at Whitney. . . . Inside the bungalow she found a couple of dozen people, mostly men, hanging out. Funded by the bars, there was a pool table and space for rap groups and dances.

Pokey also tracked down Integrity/Houston, which evolved from a small Dignity group at Holy Rosary Church three years earlier. . . . "But, again, it was all gay guys," Pokey said, "mostly older, conservative, closeted men." This self-described "fellowship for homophiles" included founders Bill Buie, Mark Barron, Hugh Crell, and Keith McGee. As an unaffiliated political group, it provided gay

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speakers, sponsored VD screenings, and supported political candidates. . . .

Later Pokey wrote a children's fable, "Star and the 75." This is a story of Star's love for Laura, who abandoned her for a man. Star, wondering if she was "the only woman in the world who thought women were important enough to love for real," went to the Center: "But there were mostly men there. So, as a joke, she would always pretend there were really 75 women there. Her friend John would say, 'Oh you just missed them. The 75 just left.' And Star would always say, 'Darn, I missed them again.'"

Pokey explains, "Back then, it was a total fantasy to find 75 lesbians anywhere in Houston, except for a bar."

. . . In Houston, a bevy of newspapers and radio shows, an array of groups ranging from softball teams to motorcycle clubs, and a stable political infrastructure transformed Montrose from an "amorphous cohesiveness" of individuals in 1970 to the "San Francisco of the South" a decade later.

When Integrity was founded in 1970, a local printer, Floyd Goff (under the name Phil Frank), published *Nuntius*, using money produced from his swinger's club newspaper and bingo parlor receipts to subsidize the paper. An alternative radio

station (KPFT-FM) also started that year, and within a couple of years a live show with taped programs to "enlighten the straight

community" had evolved into the show "Out of the Closets, Into the Streets" that aired every other Sunday afternoon.

Meanwhile, Houston women switched from fast to slow-pitch softball, opening up ball fields at Memorial Park to scores of other lesbians. Women formed basketball and touch football teams. Some men formed or joined

biker communities. In 1972, the Houston Motorcycle Club held club meetings at Mary's bar. A year earlier, the Texas Riders, Houston's oldest motorcycle club, had begun publishing a newsletter. Headquartered at the Locker on Westheimer, these men of leather held Christmas and pledge parties, conducted change-of-command ceremonies, and sponsored interclub activities with local and regional "runs." . . . The Gaze Center hosted meetings for Christian gays. Eventually this study group, led by Arnold Lawson, would become MCC of the Resurrection.

During the '70s, the city bar scene grew proportionately with the gay population and its increasing openness. . . . Among the city's 30-odd queer bars, the most notorious and oldest was the hustler-friendly, poorly lit Exile on Bell Street (billed as "Texas' Oldest Western Bar") and La Caja on Tuam,



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BRANDON WOLF

MORE SCENES FROM THE SEVENTIES: Pokey Anderson (far left) poses with part of the group attending the National Gay Task Force White House Conference. The photograph was taken at the White House on March 26, 1977. After the meeting on gay rights, Anderson (inset) talks to reporters at a press conference.

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From Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South by James T. Sears, copyright © 2001 by James T. Sears with permission of Rutgers University Press.

C.M. Lynn gave the community "a degree of respect and confidence" toward the Houston Police Department. Further, he pledged not to raid bars if no illegal activities occurred. . . .

Although local homosexual political groups were no longer active in 1974, they certainly lacked a critical mass of homosexual Southerners, who generally preferred reading a just-released novel, *The Front Runner*, or a *New Yorker* gay short story, quietly switching the TV channel from *Marcus Welby's "The Outrage"* or *Police Woman's "Flowers of Evil"*, or weekend dancing to "The Hustle" or "Never Can Say Goodbye." Three years would pass before a former Miss America runner-up and an encyclopedia salesman would square off in Dade County to ignite the second Stonewall rebellion. ■

Leaders of Integrity/Houston called on gay men also had a shock. The grisly discovery dropped out of the Top 40, Texas lesbians and apartment with the assistance of two teen accomplices, generated headlines across the nation. . . .

When Mayor Welch chose not to run for re-election that fall, Integrity/Houston invited the three top candidates to speak at a private meeting. Only one accepted: Fred Hoheinz. Integrity circulated flyers to 25 gay bars on election eve supporting Hoheinz's candidacy during his runoff election with city councilman Dick Gottlieb. Although his opponent was supported by the mayor and construction interests, Hoheinz won with a margin of about 3,000 votes—allowing Houston gays to claim credit for his narrow victory.

Mayor Hoheinz brought in a new police chief with whom representatives of the gay community met in early February 1974. Chief

after Lou Reed's "Walk on the Wild Side" had . . . During the dog days of August 1973, psychiatrist instead of City Council." "You're abnormal! You need to see a council member, Frank Mann, shouted, walked out, and the infamous homophobic declaration of gay pride week. Mayor Welch liaison to the Police Department, and a end to police harassment of homosexuals, a Gaze Center, the trio politely requested an political advocacy group formed out of the Houston City Council. As leaders of the new Berger, and Bob Osborne stood before . . . In May 1973, Billy Walker, Chuck entire gay community." reflects on me. What we do reflect on the "What I do reflects on you. What you do reinforced the old Mattachine message—distributed silk-screened posters that appearances of plainclothes vice officers. They "bargers to practice "enlightened self-interest," reminding them of the frequent Leaders of Integrity/Houston called on of acid, Quaaludes, pot, uppers." almost any drug you wanted: tabs non-existent. It was easy to get when "the war on drugs was almost Promethean Society, remembers, Patterson, one of the founders of the This was also an era, as David do the Cotton-Eyed Joe. It was there that Pokey learned to where Bookstop is today]. Both Shepherd, across the street from Landing, opened in 1973 [just off S. and West Coasts, the Bayou gay dance halls between the East boasting a back patio rife with sexual activity. One of the biggest

ONE MORE SCENE FROM THE SEVENTIES: The Houston Ducks softball team, coached by the Pride Parade's Carol Clark (far right). Pokey Anderson is in the second row, second from right.

