

SPI DONATION COLLECTION HISTORY

This the history of how it came about that all the street fairs and some of the public celebrations in San Francisco have donation collection at their entrances.

This a recent phenomenon, and one that SPI created. None of the street fairs and public celebrations use to collect donations at the entrances/gates to these public events (or anywhere within the event itself) prior to 1989.

In October of 1989 the Loma Prieta earthquake that collapsed the Bay Bridge occurred. I was sitting watching TV one night when a reporter said the mayor was asking for donations to earthquake relief organizations. Halloween on Castro Street was only a few weeks away. The Castro Halloween had been a spontaneous event for 10 years prior to this. It was chaotic, without a sponsor, producer, or any organization providing structure. 100,000 people would show up spontaneously in the queer neighborhood on the street October 31 every year and the police would close the streets to traffic. Each year Community United Against Violence (CUAV) assembled "safety monitors" whose job it was to patrol the footprint of the event inside the closed off streets. If they spotted violence they would radio the police who took care of the problem.

I decided it might be worthwhile to try to raise some donations Halloween night for the Mayor's Earthquake Relief Fund. I called 6 of my fellow Sisters. We stood at Market and Castro Streets (the entrance to the event) with buckets. I stood on a ladder exhorting the revelers to donate when they entered. We collected several hundred dollars in 4 hours.

The following weeks Sister X and I met with CUAV and a supervisor's aide to plan Castro Halloween 1990.

In 1990 I asked the Gay Men's Chorus to do the collection at ALL entrances to the celebration. We set up a stage at Noe and Market streets. Mother Theresa Nervina (Founder of Seattle SPI) sang and the Seattle Order performed, as well as numerous other acts. The evening included a costume contest. We hung a giant mirrored ball in the intersection. We raised about \$30,000 for charity the first year. For the first time in the history of Castro Halloween the event had an official producer and street closure permit holder. It was an intensive organizational effort beginning each December for the following year's Halloween, for the next 5 years.

When it became obvious that thousands of untapped dollars could be raised thru donations, all the other street fairs and outdoor celebrations (Pride, Folsom, Castro, etc.) began doing the same thing.

A couple years after our successful harnessing of Castro Halloween, CUAUV and other “mainstream” groups felt we should hand the entire event over to more “respectable” organizations. Sister X and I went to an arbitration with CUAUV, the Human Rights Commission (Larry Brinkin) acting as arbiters. We argued that Halloween was a quintessentially QUEER and drag holiday and SPI was the queerest organization in the community. We argued that these more “mainstream” gay/lesbian groups were condescending and oppressive in their attempts to steal this event from a drag/transgender activist group after we had done the hard work of transforming it from a fund-drain to a fundraiser. We said we deserved the SAME respect on the SAME level as any other community organization. The Human Rights Commission’s decision was that the drag queens (SPI) had a right to continue producing and controlling Castro Halloween. It was OUR idea to harness this spontaneous event and start collecting donations IN THE FIRST PLACE! It was a HUGE fight, and WE WON!

Prior to this, drag/transgender organizations were NOT given the same respect as other community groups. They had no transgenders on their Board’s of Director’s, in the titles of their organizations, or represented on stages at their events. The whole term “transgender” was brand new, being debated and pushed by Sister X and I and other SPI members-DEMANDED would be a better description. We would barge into community meetings and wouldn’t sit down or shut up until they addressed the issues important to transgenders.

It is amazing what we got away with in those days. We would go to police and ISCOTT meetings and demand that they waive ALL fees for police and other services for the event. If we didn’t get our way, we would go to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and have a Supervisor bring the issue up for a vote. We argued that Castro Halloween was a spontaneous event for 10 years and the event would happen whether we were involved or not. The city would have to provide police , etc., ANYWAY. We threatened that if the city forced us to pay for these services we would walk away from the event and they could deal with the ensuing chaos. We NEVER paid for ANY city services all 5 years we produced the event. I guess it is hard for someone to say NO to a nun!!!

Grand Mother Vicious Power Hungry Bitch

a Founder of The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence
San Francisco