

THE WHITE NIGHT RIOTS

(The Second Stonewall)

In November 1978 Dan White assassinated the San Francisco Mayor and Supervisor Harvey Milk. After a flawed trial Dan was convicted of manslaughter (not murder) and given a light sentence of 8 years (out in 5) for killing 2 people. Dan had been a cop and the atmosphere between the queer community and the police had been hostile for years.

The verdict was issued on May 21, 1979. The first manifestation of The Sisters was the month before (day before Easter). The night of the assassination had been a somber march of thousands from the Castro to City Hall. The day of the verdict would be anything but somber. People were outraged and expressed it!

Fred Brungard (Sister Missionary Position-Mish) and I were living at 272 Dolores and I was working at the Hall of Justice where the courts were. My co-workers and I heard the verdict over the radio. I told my boss, "I have to go>" He said, "I understand." I got to Noe and Market streets (not in habit) when this wave of angry marchers came down the middle of Market street with a banner stretched across the street in front of them which read "HE GOT AWAY WITH MURDER". I joined in and when we arrived at City Hall there were already 2000 people on the steps screaming, "1,2,3,4,we won't take this shit no more". They were shaking their fists in unison to the rhythm of the chant. Shaking them at City Hall, the symbol of authority and power in San Francisco. This went on for about 2 hours. The police were just inside the doors of City Hall in riot gear, expecting that we might break in through the locked doors. Outside, in the front row of the protesters on the steps, were a group of young men who were anarchists. The vast majority of the crowd were gay men but these guys didn't look like gay clones. They had long hair. One of the anarchists succeeded in pulling a long strip of gold metal off of the ornate metal work on the doors. He used it as a battering ram, smashed the glass and all HELL BROKE LOOSE! Where all the rocks came from I have no idea but I saw lesbians and gay men ripping up the pavement in the Civic Center and hurling it toward the windows on the Polk street side of City Hall. Before we were through, every window on the building had been broken. A group of lesbians climbed in thru the basement windows and tried to set papers on desks on fire. Firemen rushed into the rooms from inside the building, putting out fires. About this time, a fire truck with ladder came slowly down Polk street in front of City Hall. The

crowd landed on this truck like locusts breaking everything we could reach. I broke a windshield wiper. The truck slowly backed up and disappeared.

Suddenly, all at the same time, everyone took notice of 10 cop cars parked in a neat row, bumper to bumper, through Civic Center plaza. The cops had left them there, unguarded, when they went into City Hall. The windows were all down. It was a mad dash to see who could set them on fire first. I got to the 3rd car with a lighted palm frawn and stuck it into the driver's side window just as another boy arrived at the opposite passenger's side window. He said, "DAMN!" and went on to the next car. The cars went up in flames immediately, with sirens screaming all night in a mournful wail.

Finally, the cops inside City Hall had had enough. They came rushing out of the building and across Civic Center plaza. We took off running toward Market street. As I passed by a van, Mish called out to me. He was hiding under it, with a helmet on his head. We continued breaking windows up Market street. I thought that was the end of the night's activities and decided to head to Castro street for a cocktail at the Midnight Sun. When I arrived on Castro street cop cars were speeding 60 miles an hour down the street as queens were hurling bottles, and anything they could lay their hands on, at the cars. I threw a bottle and hit a back window. The cops were the most fascist homophobic pigs you could imagine. I know. I WORKED WITH THEM! I saw every day what they did, said and acted like.

I went into the Midnight Sun and 20 to 30 preppy looking sweater queens were watching music videos and sipping cocktails. All of a sudden the doors to the bar slammed shut. Then a baton was banging and the door popped open with the cop ordering everyone out into the street. You should have seen the expressions on the faces of these poor lil' gay children who had NEVER been in anything more than a wild college pep rally, forced out into MAYHEM! A line of cops were stretched across Castro at the Castro Theater and a line of queers were stretched out across the street 100 feet in front of them, face to face. All night these lines moved up and down the street. The cops would force our line down toward 18th street and we would force them back up toward Market street, trying to force them out of OUR neighborhood. After a couple hours I left and went home. After I left the cops stormed into the Elephant Walk bar at 18th and Castro streets and trashed the place. The Bay area Reporter newspaper upon the 30th anniversary of the White Night Riots interviewed one of Harvey Milks associate (now California State Assemblyman) Tom Ammiano who said, "I

am grateful that when the verdict came out people were not just silent. I am glad we were so 'vocal'." California State Senator Mark Leno said the White Night riots were "something San Francisco needed to go through in order for its populace to heal."

Kenneth Bunch-(AKA- Grand Mother Vicious Power Hungry Bitch)
a Founder of The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence
San Francisco