

# Arthur Evans: Veteran Activist

BY NAPHTALI OFFEN

The Gay Liberation Movement, in its militant form, celebrates ten years this June, with the anniversary of the much-heralded Stonewall riots. The events that followed that full-moon rebellion changed the lives, not only of the Lesbians and Gay men who were there, but of the millions of Gay people who followed.

HM Gay member Arthur Evans was one of the early pioneers of Gay Activism. He was among those members of the Gay Liberation Front who formed the Gay Activists Alliance, the organization that brought Gay consciousness into the homes, if not the hearts, of New Yorkers of the early 70's.

Interviewed with fellow activist Marty Robinson by Dick Cavett in November 1970, Arthur paved the way for national exposure of the budding Gay Liberation movement. Arrested five times in Gay protests, Arthur was something of a folk hero to the early Gay activists. His courage and vision gave him a reputation as an inspirational leader.

In October, 1978 Fag Rag Books published Arthur's "Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture"—a radical view of western civilization and "some of the people it has tried to destroy."

I interviewed him at the Buggery, the Volkswagen repair shop he runs with me.

Naphtali: What was special about the early days that followed Stonewall?

Arthur: We had a sense of creating ourselves from scratch. We paid very little attention to straight standards, or for that matter, to prevailing Gay standards of the day. We were engaged in an act of self-creation.

We shared a dream—that we would create a society in which it would be safe to have Gay pride—anywhere. Up until then, if you had Gay pride, you were an outcast.

N: What tactics were found to be effective?

A: We believed in confrontation—on two levels. On one—we would confront the oppressors, hold them personally



Photo by Robert John Florence

### Arthur Evans and Naphtali Offen

responsible for their actions—not allow the bureaucrats, the politicians, or the corporate officers to hide behind their organizations. And on the other level, we would confront ourselves—challenge the closet mentality that imprisoned us—be open and defiant and full of joy—to set an example for other Gay people to see that we could create our own alternatives.

N: What did you do specifically?

A: In late 1969 we introduced the first Gay rights legislation. We called it the "Out of the closet" bill. If it passed, Lesbians and Gay men would be afforded legal protection from discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations.

But actual passage of the bill was always considered far less important than the struggle to get it passed. The struggle itself would shatter closet doors—involving large numbers of people, creating a social milieu in which the bill itself would be almost unnecessary. In that sense, the bill has passed.

We took years of self-hatred and turned it around. We harnessed our righteous indignation and honed it into a tool that was devastatingly effective. We used our sense of humor

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## Hearing on Police Actions

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Without a word he began hitting me in the back, sholder and as I turned and raised my arm to protect my face, he swung his night stick with both hands breaking my arm."

The hearing ended with several people in the audience having an opportunity to relate their experiences. The committee ordered all testimony turned over to the police commission and that they investigate and report back to the Board of Supervisors what action is taken. Supervisor Britt summed his feelings, "The public had an opportunity to air their grievances and to make the Board aware of the irresponsible actions of the police. I will continue to press for strong action on the part of the Board of Supervisors to make the police department more representative of the community and see that officers responsible are brought to bear for their actions."

The investigations by the Police Commission or its contracted investigative team must confront the charges made in the committee hearing and the charges made by the remaining witnesses. Since May 21, the press of San Francisco has failed in its duty to report allegations of police misconduct, but have given Bob Berry column after column to tell his woeful story of police officer's injuries inflicted by a riotous mob at city hall and again on Castro Street. The gay community must use the public hearings of the Board of Supervisors and the Police Commission to force the issue and let the public know of the misconduct of the police that night. Supervisor Britt's office is continuing to compile evidence of inappropriate police action, anyone desiring to relate an incident should contact the office at City Hall, 558-2145.

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