

THE YOUNG LORDS

Mathis Shelley

During Christmas week, the week that many GLFers were participating in the Panther vigil around the Women's House of Detention, the Young Lords were occupying a church in Spanish Harlem. They left peacefully after being served with an injunction - but during their stay 200 children were fed hot breakfasts daily. Over 100 children were given complete physical examinations. The Young Lords held classes, poetry readings, filmshowings, and a New Year's Mass by a radical priest. And the church was open to all the people.

On December 31st and January 31st, your COME OUT reporter, armed with six copies of the last issue, went up to visit the Young Lords. The neighborhood, 111th Street and Lexington Avenue was familiar to me from my days as a caseworker at Harlem Welfare Center - but in those days I had been reluctant to travel there at night. This time I was more afraid of the hordes of police prowling the neighborhood: the TPF, who seemed anxious to let loose on the Young Lords.

I was searched before being allowed to enter the church. Jim, a GLF'er who had been spending quite a bit of time with the Lords, had explained this to me: "They're trying to keep the place clean of drugs and weapons - so as not to give the police an excuse for a raid - you know, plant a little dope and raid the place and get the Young Lords written up in the papers as running an opium den."

Jim had also explained to me why they had taken over this particular church. There are only three large churches in the neighborhood. The others are small pentecostal storefronts, inadequate for a breakfast program. Of the three large churches, two already had programs going on during the week, and the Lords did not want to interfere with these programs. The first Spanish Methodist Church, however, was closed all during the "week" except for a few hours on Sunday. The parishioners, having gotten better jobs, moved up in the social ladder and out of El Barrio, no longer have much to do with the local residents. They do maintain the church there, and come in for services on Sundays.

The Young Lords had written Dr. Humberto Carranza, minister of the church, asking for permission to use the church during the week. They talked with him. When these negotiations proved fruitless, they came to church services and spoke with the congregation. Dr. Carranza then called in the police, and 13 Young Lords, men and women, were beaten and arrested on charges of "inciting to riot." On December 28th, the Young Lords took over the church, and began running their programs. As Jon said, "We are trying to show that radicals are not just people who go around yelling 'fascist pig!'"

When I had passed inspection and was allowed to enter the church, I asked to see Yoruba, Minister of Information. He was in a meeting. The Young Lords invited me to wait and have dinner with them, but I wasn't hungry. I wandered around the church for a while.

The church was hung with the children's drawings, and with revolutionary posters and slogans. "The doors are open to the people's church." "Jesus Christ helped the poor." "All power to the people." "A Vietnam yo ho voy, porque yinqui yo no soy." It will not go to Vietnam because I'm not a Yankee.) One man was attempting to teach Puerto Rican history to a class of usually eight year olds. In the chapel, I sat down next to a Young Lord named Robles and two women whom I knew from Women's Liberation. They were discussing what to do when the police served their injunction.

After a while, a young woman with long black hair asked me to follow her to the office of the Young Lords Organization, on Madison Avenue between 111th and 112th Street. She told me Yoruba was upstairs napping, that he had been up for 24 hours straight. At the office, another woman in an Afro was acting as receptionist, worming the phones and talking with whoever came in. I gave her a copy of COME OUT and explained my business. She knew the history of the Stoenwall riots, which she related to my escort.

Two men and another woman came into the office and sat down. We all waited around. Then a black man apparently unaffiliated with any group, came in to the office, stamping snow off his boots. He spoke to the receptionist for a while, then caught the eye of the newspaper.

"What's this?" He picked it up. "Homosexual!" He sneered.

One of the Young Lords spoke up. "Like this is a movement to liberate all kinds of people - black, Puerto Rican, white, heterosexual, homosexual. The man shook his head. "I just came in to talk to one of the Young Lords."

"You were just talking to one," the Young Lord said, nodding towards the receptionist.

"Ain't but two people here who look like they could be Lords."

The Young Lord answered patiently. "There are five Lords here." He pointed to the three women and two men seated, excluding myself and the black fellow.

We waited some more. Someone went out for cigarettes. I was getting hungry. The receptionist gave me some pork lo mein from the back room. A sign over the sink read: "We are not here to oppress each other. Wash your own dishes."

While I was eating, the YLO lawyer came in. We asked him about the injunction. He said that Dr. Carranza had come before the court with badly drawn up papers. The judge was unable to grant an injunction on this basis and he could have thrown the case out - but he postponed the hearing until Friday, giving Dr. Carranza's lawyers time to fix up their papers.

Shortly afterwards, the Young Lords closed their office and we went back to the church. It seemed unlikely that I would be able to see Yoruba that night, so I went home and came back the following day.

After being searched again, I waited for a while, watching people bring milk and medical supplies to the

church. Then I went down into the basement, which was being used as the kitchen and dining hall. Jon was there again. So were some women from Women's Liberation, a representative of the grape workers, and some people from Newsweek who were filming the occupation. I was able to interview Robles, Minister of Defense, at length.

He said that the Young Lords had been in existence for a year, and that they had taken over a similar church in Chicago. He described their programs, and added that anyone could sleep in the church - that wins and junkies were being housed for the night. Remembering my own cursory search, I asked how they managed to keep junk out of the church. He said that the junkies were searched more thoroughly, and that he could tell a junkie from a "straight" person - since he had been a heroin addict for 15 years before he joined the Young Lords. Robles appeared to be in his early thirties.

He had been released from Riker's Island in January of 1969 - had joined the Young Lords subsequently, and has been off drugs ever since. I asked if there were any other guys like him in the organization. He knew of 30 or so, all ex-junkies.

He refused to reveal any plans for the defense of the church.

I asked him how the programs operated. He said the food and medical supplies were contributed by local groceries, by the Hunts Point market, by radical doctors and sympathetic people in general. A radical doctor's group, including medical students, was running the clinic.

How did one get to be a Young Lord? Simply by serving the community, by proving oneself through service. Officers were chosen by consensus, if there were any vacancies created - such as by a member being in jail. Programs were determined through meetings within the organization, and meetings with the community. "Whoever is with us is a Young Lord... whoever works with us and saves the people."

After Robles left, I had coffee with one of my sisters from Women's Liberation. She had been working in the nursery. A boy of twelve came by, springing down the tables, talking with the people seated there. I saw Jon again. He was on his way upstairs with a mop and bucket.

After a while I left, thinking about what can be done in a community center, what GLF could do with a church or a hall or housewreck. What it would be like when GLF has its community center, how we could serve our people... what we might learn from the Young Lords' experience...

P.S. The Young Lords offered no resistance when they were ousted from the church however, 100 demonstrators were arrested. Currently the Young Lords are negotiating with the church. Their demands include a free day care program, medical services, a breakfast program, a liberation school, amnesty for all those arrested on an indigenous community board to govern these programs.

GO TO CHURCH



Photo LNS

Letters TO US.

Dear COME OUT Staff:

Blessings to you for your well-written, professional, neatly laid out (easy to read - not rife of most underground or radical papers) but blessing most of all for your gentle, yet audacious tone. You see with clear eyes and head. Beautiful.

I hope you avoid - (I'm confident you will) all sexual commercialization and exploitation. Hundreds of papers and magazines are doing that now - hopefully they satisfy their readers' fantasies. But, your paper begins a new era in gay journalism, one based on a genuine love for all our brothers and sisters, and a positively-negative critique of the repressive capitalist (it's really corporate-elitist) conformist, heterosexual society in which we live. You are and will help to sketch the already emerging "new" sexuality, without labels of bi-, hetero-, and/or homo - a polymorphous sexuality and new family and communal forms.

I'll cut this overly heavy shit - and wish you all well. And I'll try to contribute something - maybe a piece on homosexuality in the movies, both Hollywood and Underground. I won't make a definite promise, but I will make some notes during the next few weeks.

Right On

In love and peace

-and a lot of power to the people
Literally.

Your brother in love,

Jim Wenger

-and my lover Peter

Dear Sirs:

May I extend my congratulations to you on your successful publication of a gay newspaper. Its importance cannot be overestimated, for through it and similar publications we of the gay community will be able to present a united front and let America know we are a real and viable force.

But I would like to interject a word of caution, especially regarding militancy. If I thought it would help, this very moment I'd turn into a gay militant, but reading historical examples, I feel the gay movement will have a greater and more far reaching effect if we, as a united group, follow the peaceful philosophies of Gandhi and Martin Luther King. The black militants in this country have done more to harm the Negro cause than any KKK. The real Negro warriors have resulted from a system of peaceful protest.

Just as there were anti-fall anti-Negro outcries by injustice, I too am outraged by the injustice that I as a homosexual have had to endure. I am outraged, but too it would be wiser to be more patient. Outcries of hatred and condemnation will not be swept away overnight. We have to educate ourselves as well as society into realizing we are good people, responsible citizens, and productive members of society. We can't condemn present society for a condition that has existed for hundreds of years, nor can we hope to eradicate all prejudice. Our goals must be realistic, not idealistic, even though I myself am an idealist at heart. We must concentrate on education and law reform, and hope that in time tolerance and acceptance will follow.

Sincerely yours,
Arthur Schreffels,
President,
Personal Rights Organization
of Toledo

Dear Come Out:

None of the papers (above or underground) saw fit to carry news of the January 11th demonstration.

Perhaps the ankle-length green sequined gown I wore was too much for them. Anyway, the *Free Press* (LA) may run an article I submitted to them next week - better late than never and all that - and perhaps some San Fran papers as well.

Enclosed is an article similar to the one I submitted to the *Free Press* that I hope finds its way into your pages.

Let the New York Gays know there ARE at least 300 of us in Los Angeles that will get out into the streets.

LA is a real mess and it is a minor miracle that the march came off at all. But, it was beautiful, and this girl almost cried out of joy as we strolled along Hollywood boulevard.

GLFLA is getting itself together and about 150 people have attended the four meetings altogether. I am in the process of liberation and my activities with GLP are most helpful.

Spread the news around.

Love and peace

Douglas Key

Gay Power to Gay People

(Lift the chains of Orion)

LA Sweep

An estimated 300 male and female homosexuals marched in a candlelight procession through the streets of Hollywood on the evening of January 11th. Day-long rain drenched the projected 500-1000 people expected to show, but the rain stopped shortly before the march began and resumed a few minutes before it ended.

Reverend Troy Perry of the Metropolitan Community Church (a Gay church in Los Angeles), Bishop Michael Han and Father John of the Evangelical Catholic Community of San Francisco, and other men wearing religious costumes led the march. Signs, flags and banners were carried by the marchers with statements such as "Rafferty, Reagan, Nixon - Myra's Gonna Get You All," "Gay is Excellent," "Law Reform Now" and others. The marchers sang freedom songs and chanted slogans. Many Gays joined the march as it passed along Hollywood boulevard, although some fled in terror.

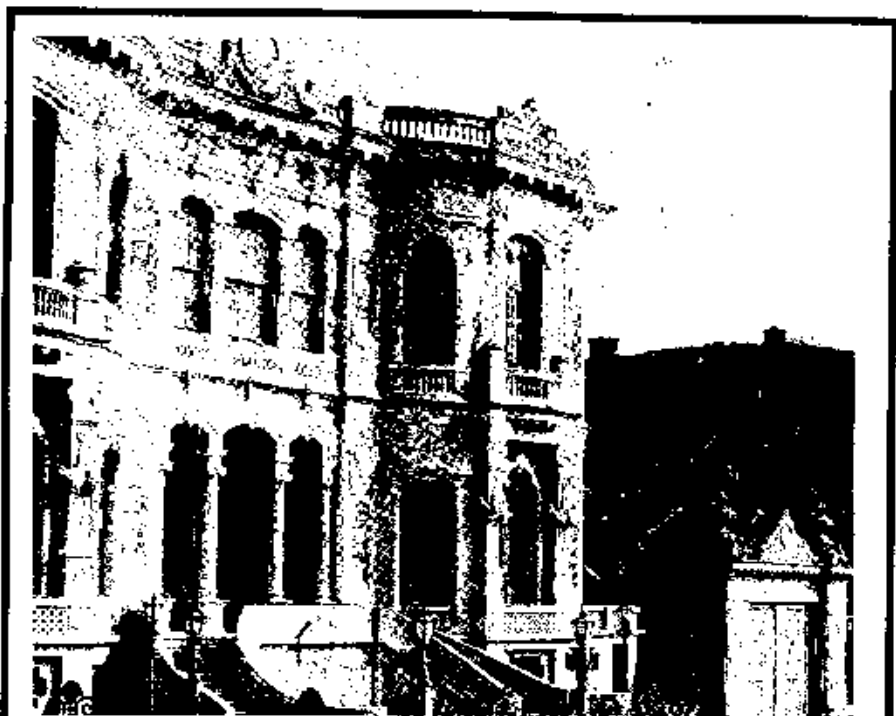
A large number of police in vehicles monitored the march but no violence occurred and no arrests were made.

Rumors of violence on the part of GLFLA people who participated in the march proved false and were attempts by some individuals to destroy the unity that has recently come into being between radical and conservative elements of the Gay movement in Los Angeles.

Other groups participating in the march were the Society of Anubis, HEM, H.R.C.P. and the Homosexual Information Center.

The march was organized by the Committee for Homosexual Law Reform to protest the laws in California that make homosexual acts a felony.

The march was not covered by any of the LA papers or media although an NBC TV crew was seen setting up equipment as the march formed but, the TV crew left before the march began.



COMMUNITY CENTER

The Gay Liberation Front is in dire need of a Community Center. In five short months we have accomplished more than we dreamed possible. We have confronted the Mayoral Candidates, participated under our banner in the Manifestations, funded a Newspaper, published periodic Newsletters, successfully picketed The Village Voice, fed and clothed needy people, formed Encounter groups and given the militant Homosexual a voice in the Community Liberation Front.

We have no dues and no membership fees. Our only source of income is a monthly Dance. We do not even have a regular meeting place. Our dream is a Community Center to serve the needs of the Homosexual. Our reality could be a basement, a loft, a studio, any place we could set up an office, telephones, hold dances, and conduct meetings. Can anyone help us? The life you FIND may be your own!

Gay Liberation Front

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