

The Barb Gay Pages

A Gay Interview

by Eddie Van

Eddie: Good morning Perry. What is your whole name and where do you come from?

Perry: My whole name is H.L. Perry. I don't tell anyone what the H.L. stands for. I am a native Californian. I was born here, actually I was born in Oakland, because my mother was there at the time, but we lived in San Francisco.

E: When were you first in touch with anything gay?

P: When I was very, very young, about six years old. I think I've been gay all my life. I never went through a straight period with girls.

E: When did you first enter the Gay Community in San Francisco?

P: When I was in Lincoln High School. I ran into some Gay kids from Lowell High School and found out I wasn't the only one. That was my first realization that there was a Gay Community out there even though it was very small.

E: After you were introduced to the Gay Community, how did you progress from there?

P: I really don't know, because in those days there were only three gay bars. There wasn't that much gay activity in those days, as the police were harassing people as they are doing in other cities now. In those days there was no place to congregate, especially if you weren't old enough to get into the three gay bars they had.

E: What were the names of the gay bars that were operating at that time?

P: The original one was the Camellia Room, owned by Lupe, and I believe the Black Cat. (The Black Cat was not really gay, but there were a lot of gay people in it.) The next one I remember was Jim Dolans.

E: When did the Gay Community start to have gay functions?

P: I believe the Tavern Guild started the first gay function that I remember. The Beaux Arts Ball. The Black Cat on Halloween night became a big thing. There used to be several gay functions in the past, but I was too young to remember them.



The Beaux Arts Ball

They had a Beaux Arts Ball also, but it was raided. I was too young to remember what was going on or who ran it or anything. I do remember no one wanted to do it anymore because the police would raid them.

E: How did the Tavern Guild get started?

P: The Tavern Guild got started by a bunch of bartenders as a social club. They elected officers and got started that way. It was not originally started by the bar owners. It then evolved into the big organization that it is today.

E: When did you first become interested, in your particular area, in giving public gay functions?

P: Well, someone came to me and asked me to do a benefit auction. First of all, I have worked for many years with underprivileged children. During

the Viet Nam war I adopted an orphanage in Saigon by the name of St. Elizabeth's Orphanage. I raised money at Christmas parties every year on my own, which I donated to the underprivileged children, whom I still work with, except now at Easter instead of Christmas.

Anyway, someone came to me and asked me to do this auction for the National Legal Defense Fund, which eventually turned out to be AB 49. AB 49 is the sex law changes. Non-discrimination against persons desiring the sexual preference of ones own sex, etc. We threw an auction at the Missouri Mule which raised \$750, which was something that had never been done before.

Then I was asked to do one for a motorcycle club which raised about \$1000. Those were the first things I did as Perry. At that time I didn't use the H.L.



Halloween at the Hilton

With ten other people we started the Halloween Bus that now appears every Halloween night. I called Greyhound and told them there would be ten of us, each dressed as a woman, and we had each chosen a movie star as a theme. I told them we were going to take this bus throughout the city and appear at different bars. I asked them the legalities involved -- as in those days, if you were dressed as a woman the police could arrest you. Greyhound investigated the legal points and called me back and said we had the bus.

So there was myself, Michelle, Royal, Agnes Gooch and Chuck. I can't remember who all the rest of them were. Franklin was going to be on the bus, but got off before it ever got started. When Halloween night came, we had the attorney for Greyhound there and he said if the police came we were to get back on the bus and close the doors, and as we were on private property, the police could not arrest us. We initiated the first bus which is now a tradition on every Halloween night.

The next year I and some of the others got off that bus and started their own buses such as you know them today. Some of us started to do different themes every year. There were about 15 or 20 people in the entourage. Michelle started doing her own trip and the whole city was waiting for these buses every Halloween night. It finally grew until I was asked to M.C. at the Alley Cat and lend my name to their limos and buses.

I was one of the first paid M.C.'s for Halloween night. Every year these function became more elaborate and expensive. We had to block off the street by the Alley Cat so the people would have a place to see all the entertainment. I am referring to straight as well as gay people. It was a Mardi Gra type thing.

E: Getting to the big hotels. Weren't you responsible for the breakthrough to using the prestigious hotels for gay functions?

P: Well, I went to the Fairmont Hotel, which is considered the most prestigious hotel in the world, and told them I wanted to

throw a function there. When he asked me what type, I told him I wanted the grand ballroom and there would be men that were dressed as women. And so, he went along with me and let me do it. They wouldn't take a drag ball before when someone else wanted to do it.

It really opened up the hotels. The same year the Queen of Oakland, as she was called then, wanted to throw a ball at a hotel in Oakland and referred them to me, Mr. Perry who had thrown a ball at the Fairmont, and they readily agreed as they had heard about the ball I had given. Since the ball was very well organized and they made money and had no problems, it wasn't a complete sell-OUT. BUT they made money, they agreed to her ball.

E: Also Perry, you have been responsible for many breakthroughs involving the evolution of the Gay Community which probably has been met with opposition, like anyone who achieves any amount of recognition. Can you explain any of this?

P: Actually, the ball I gave was boycotted by the people who thought they controlled the Gay Community at that time. I mean they actually called people on the telephone and asked them not to go.

E: Actually, it does not make any difference what the situation is because most people will go ahead and do what they feel like. I think you have been a contributing factor to the Gay Community on a very good basis.

You were responsible for the first person to appear as a female in a public parade. Is that true?

P: Yes, in Hollywood. I was the first one in female attire in a parade. There were others, but they were either transvestites, or transexuals, but I was the first to appear as a known female impersonator. I appeared as the Grand Duchess of San Francisco, with the Crown Jewels and all. Even the Empress down there did not ride in the first parade. They were all afraid! I have never been afraid, I've always been a forerunner!!

In those days, when I started doing my own thing, I owned my own business, which I still do, so I could afford to do what I wanted to do. I was told one time I shouldn't go in drag as I was representing the Gay Community, so in the second Gay Parade I went as myself. The strangest thing happened. No one knew who I was. They all knew me in drag, but not as a man.

The following year I went back in drag and made National television. I also might add that I was Chairman and Co-Chairman of the first two Gay Freedom Day Parades in San Francisco. That was when no one else wanted to be bothered with it but the Gay radicals.

Comment:

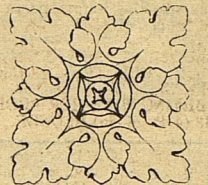
Some of the achievements for the Gay Community that Perry has created and promoted are: The Titles Grand Duke and Duchess of San Francisco, The Gay Community Awards, Mr. and Miss Gay San Francisco, all of which he has given over to the Community. He also created the Mr. and Miss Gay California titles. Also, Perry served two terms on the Tavern Guild Board of Directors.

The first award Perry ever received was from the straight community. He was honored as Citizen of the Day by KABL Radio for his work with underprivileged children, and his work with St. Elizabeth's Orphanage in Saigon, Vietnam.

As a man, he has always been a forerunner in the Gay Community. Liked by some, opposed by others, but always a contributing factor in the evolution of the Gay Community in San Francisco and the Bay Area. Through the years he has received recognition by the Gay Community as well as the straight press as one of the leaders of the Gay Community. He still is, as always, H.L. Perry.



Mr. Gay Calif. with Perry



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