

Allyson Allante (nee Williamson Henderson) is a founding member of the Imperial Queens of New York & Long Island. She was also an eye witness to the gay life in Manhattan during the historic summer of 1969. What follows is her account of that era and the night of The Stonewall riot.

Reflections of the Stonewall Era

I confess, I was a teenage model during the late 1960's --even though my personal manager and the agency I worked for, which specialized in young models, thought my hair was too long. In those days that meant that I looked "too gay." I soon proved them wrong when after a much publicized national campaign, Avon cosmetics chose me as the boy with "the most stylish American hairstyle." Just imagine they thought I was "Mr. Straight All-American Boy!" But you know Mary, secretly I was rather tres gay. School and commercial modeling were just the "daytime" me.

Night time was the "real " me, especially since I was always living for the weekend. On Friday evenings this blond, blue-eyed teen boy with perfect skin, great teeth and smile, a naturally smooth and sexy chest, a 28" waist and a pronounced derriere, a seductive walk and Hollywood hair motored himself out of Long Island, paid the 25 cent toll to enter the appropriately named *Queens-Midtown* tunnel, and made his way to The Big Apple.

A few of my very suburban and high schoolish gay comrades, would drive into Manhattan with me in my brand new 1969 metallic blue Cadillac convertible. Oh, Mary you should of seen us in that car. It had white leather interior, power seat, and wide, wide, whitewall tires. It was a real attention getter, and of course to make sure we were noticed, we *always* rode around town with the top all the way d-o-w-n. I still have the car to this day. It has since became a part of gay history and is often referred to as "*The Stonewall Car*."

When we would arrive at The Stonewall on Sheridan Square, Zuckie (nee Zucci) , the co-owner of the bar would always be happy to see us--especially me. He would greet us warmly at the castle-like door, a remnant of when the bar was a British-style pub. Zuckie really like me. He was always calling me "fresh fish" and unabashedly telling us how much he loved the Caddy, which he would let us park right out front. The doorman at the Stonewall was named Eddie. He was always too frenetic for my tastes, besides he preferred the trashy boys that hung around. He always embarrassed me by saying, "You little rich under aged boys are going to get this place busted one day." Rich! That merely meant that we arrived in a car and not via subway!

It's really interesting that folks nowadays think that the Stonewall was the only gay bar in the Village during that summer. Au contraire, ma cherie. Besides the Stonewall, we went to *Dr. Feelgood's* (and trust me honey it did) and *The Haven--*

which I thought was a bit too hectic to ever be much of a haven. We also would go to a really fun place called The Grapevine or Gianni's, which was really popular with the gay gals and the occasional fag.

Sometimes we would hit Julius, though at the time the crowd there was too old for me.

If we were feeling extra wild, we would stop in at The Ninth Circle, over on West 10th Street. The crowd there was considered very promiscuous, which gave the bar a notorious reputation for several decades. A lot of my friends liked to go to a bar called Kooky's, which was popular with a freewheeling lesbian crowd.

Kooky's was ran by this tough cookie who was one part Shelley Winters and one part Baby Jane Hudson. She gave fags a hard time, except for me. I think that was because she thought I was, in her words, "a sweet thing." Really I think the reason she let me in the bar was because I was usually with my friend Sonia, who was the girl of her dreams. There was another club called The Gold Bug, but since it was always filled with hard core druggies (remember this was the 60's) and was a late-night spot, it wasn't a favorite hang out for my group of friends.

Then there was The Stonewall. You know, it's so funny to me now how that name has come to mean so much. To us it was just our favorite Friday night hangout, and always our first stop for the evening. We would typically park the Cadillac out front--so everyone could see us make our grand entrance, and use the Stonewall as sort of a home base for the entire evening. We would go back and forth from all our other haunts on sort of a pub crawl. Sometimes we would even hit the Howard Johnson's Restaurant up the street on Seventh Avenue or peek into the Bon Soir, (where Barbra Streisand performed) but we were terribly loyal to The Stonewall.

The crowd at The Stonewall was always so alive. It was fascinating, a living gay theater.

There was so much going on in there, that on any given night you could have used the customers as characters in some documentary on gay life in The Village--and did it without the benefit of a script. We had our own cast of inimitable characters in all sorts of costumes and attire. There was a full mixture of people; white, beige, brown and black. Christian, Jews and probably an atheist or two. Males, females, drag queens and drag kings. The age range ran the gamut from young teens like ourselves, to men and women in their 30's, 40's and even older. I made many friends there, in fact that's where I met Bob Kholer. This pot luck stew of people was so wonderful. It was this multi-racial combination of urbanites and bridge and tunnel types, that made up the group of seven individuals who created the Imperial Queens of New York during the Halloween season of 1968. Formally, in 1969.

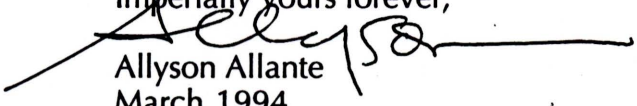
Oh what a year that was, 1969! The Vietnam war protests were all over the Village and everyone was doing their own thing. Oh, how I remember June 27th, that warm Friday night when it seemed like all hell had broke loose. We had got to The Stonewall around 1am. Judy Garland had died that week, there was a lot of sad emotion in the air. School was out for us and everyone was out for the night, "feeling their oats" and everyone else's for that matter. I'm not sure why, but for some odd reason that night a combination of the police, the liquor fuzz, the vice squad and later the tactical forces, decided to raid the bar.

They picked the wrong time and for sure the wrong place to bother with a bunch of fags who were already tired of the oppression that had been occurring all year. Just as it all started, a cop named Kevin, who had nabbed me before in The Stonewall (remember we were all under aged) , saw me and zoomed right up to me. I knew he had me then. Once outside a scuffled started--especially when they found out that the blue Cadillac parked out front belonged to me. For some reason that really riled them. I broke loose , but as the song says, there was "nowhere to run to, nowhere to hide." I was soon tackled and pulled down by a uniformed cop, a real big brute and a dumbfounded dick who couldn't believe it took three of them to take me! My poor baby, my precious blue car, was impounded and taken to the holding lot. I was taken into St. Vincent's hospital with a shoulder injury. The next afternoon they booked me for disorderly conduct and resisting arrest at the 6th Precinct headquarters and then it was off to jail for me! Not just any jail, no I was given special escort to The Tombs, the Big Apple's most notorious jail!

Today, when I think of that night and the terrible days that followed, it's not the riot, the rebellion and the ruins of The Stonewall that I remember. I prefer to savor the memories of the place itself, the music, the ambiance, the men I danced with and most of all the people who were my friends. Sadly, so many of the "Stonewall Girls" are gone now. Often I look around and marvel how few of us are still around to pass down the story of what really happened, and what gay life was like back then. Our young gay and lesbian generation need to know that they have a history, that there was life before Stonewall, during Stonewall and after.....

and that we really had a good time. As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of Stonewall this summer, let us also remember those brave and vital queens who were there at the start and who are no longer with us: Roberta Albano, Sonia Attkiss, Stanlietta Dunn, Marsha P. Johnson , Stephanie Konn and Edie Wright. I'll see you girls in "Draq Queen Heaven!"

Imperially yours forever,



Allyson Allante
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(as interviewed by JOSEPH DOWNTON of "DETOUR MAPS OF AMERICA")