

Memories of the Avant Garde

From the diary of Sheila Sullivan, age 14-1/2

2-16-66

I think if I could talk Kath [my older sister] into goin to Avant Garde Cafe Espresso with me, mom'd let me. Cuz in the Pius paper there's a suggested list of places ta go and the Cafe was among them. Ya know - so it's not like a strip joint 'r anything. Oh would that be excellent if I could go there.

2-20-66

I asked Mom bout Avant Garde yesterday & Kath said it was supposed to be an OK place. But Mom doesn't know so she's thinkin bout it. Kath said she'd go with me if Mom gave the OK. Would that be excellent! Just like where Bobby [redacted] goes. A cafe espresso.

2-21-66

I've talked Kathy into goin ta Avant Garde all right - with Linda! She's decided I was too young. I told mom and she said I'd go if she (mom) had to go with me. But I kin only stay bout an hour. I guess it's terrible cuz college kids go there. Big sin.

2-25-66

Well, the Avant Garde thing fell thru. No one said anythin or talked about it so I guess it was all forgotten...

3-4-66

Kath & Linda went to Avant Garde tonite. Kath said, "It's about as big as our livingroom and you can't see a thing. They're these guys with real long hair and a negro with no teeth singing on stage." Everyone was just lookin at everyone else. It was sooo neat. I can't wait to go there. Mmmm. What a neat atmosphere. What a way to get problems off yer mind.

3-5-66

I have to get someplace 'r sumthin ta do. Avant Garde. I hope I'm able to go there durin the summer. I hope mom lets me.

3-6-66

Kath told more bout Avant Garde. She said there's real weird paintings on the walls (old men in swim suits, OLD suits). She said it's real dark, only one bulb in the middle of the room with yellow glass fixtures with cast iron rods on it. Old lamps around with ball fringe on the shade. She said it's just an upper room of a house. Stained glass windows. Weird drinks (just soda!) named like 'La Pone' which Linda says tastes like watered down iced tea with too much sugar in it. She says no one clears the

tables of dishes until they're so cluttered they can't fit no more. Oh, it sounds so excellent. I can't wait til I get there!!

3-12-66

Avant Garde. John, Kath & I went about 8:30. It was upstairs, a real dirty hole. NEAT. It was so crowded. We had to stand. We stood on the ledge over the stairway. Bob Dylan records played. It was very dark. John gave me a cigarette. There was an assortment of people, very college, very beatnik. Finally the band came on [the "Unit"]. They played Very Loud, you could hear it a block from the place. A lot of Dylan, Rhythm & Blues, folkmusic. Many guys had real long hair. Girls, too. Some guys had beards and wore real weird things. A folksinger came on, sounded much like Dylan. Somehow you felt you knew everyone cuz you'd just talk to anyone. Had about 4 cigarettes all nite. There was signs on the wall "Big Joe Williams" & other singers. There was no dancing. Everyone just stood or sat & some clapped after the songs. One guy there looked like how you'd expect Jesus Christ to've look but bigger and he wore a big blue shawl. The guys in band goofed about, one got on top of the other's shoulders. They were really shakin it up. Finally the crowd died down and I got a chair. Stood on it, leaning against the back wall. I was so happy. I felt I fitted in and I was happy. I didn't smile or anythin but I was inside. I had a rather serious look 'cept when I joked with someone. Bout 1/2 hr. before we left we got menues. Iced Coffee? Well. It was exactly what I expected it to be so I was not surprised. I'd dreamt of goin there so much it seemed I already had been there. I want to go there as much as I can. I hope mom lets me.

3-14-66

I asked mom if I can go to Avant Garde this Saturday. No. She doesn't want me in any "dirty beatnik hole" and hanging around in any "unlit, poorly ventilated room." Oh, God. So of course dad has to shoot his 2 cents worth of shit in how it's probably a place full of homosexuals! Oh, forget it.

3-16-66

I talked to mom about Avant Garde. She gives me this big bull on how "unsavory characters" are lurking around and she wants to protect me from them. She points out sumthin I never knew before: unsavory characters are lurking around and if you talk to them you give them the wrong impression. NO KIDDING.

5-25-66

Tonite I asked ma again if John & I could go to Avant on Friday. She said, "I spoze." Yeah! Can't wait! Oh, I'm comin back Avant. I'm a-comin on back to ya! My love, my home, Avant Garde! Oh. How I've waited for you!

5-28-66

Avant Garde. John & I got there (second one's there). It was light out. I ordered tea, John iced coffee. We got a table. Small, bout 3 ft. sq. with lite brown coarse table clothes, dirty, ours had a big patch on it. We got there at 8 p.m., started to fill bout 8:50. Band came on at 9. Same as last time, The Unit. Loud harmonica. When the band took a break John got up to go to the bathroom an while climbin over chairs, knocked over his iced coffee glass. It crashed an went all over the floor. He was so embarrassed. A bunch of kids yelled "twenty-five cents." When the waitress found out, John asked how much he owed her, she said to forget it, she'd tell them she busted it. I wasn't as excited this time as last. I wore my hair no bangs parted to the side with my round glasses, black poorboy sweater, white levi pants and sling back shoes with no stockings. An a long gold chain with dad's army conduct medal around my neck.

6-20-66

Mom said the phone's off at 10 p.m. cuz she wants me to get my rest so I can "get around" durin the day. I said yeah an when I wanna get around I can't. Her reply: All you wanna do is sit in a dirty old hole. Avant Garde. If that's a dirty hole then I belong in a dirty hole cuz Avant is like a home.

8-20-66

At 9 p.m. cousin Mary [redacted] called. She decides that NOW she wants ta go ta Avant Garde cuz a girl said it was real neat. So we rushed about an got there bout 9:40. John & her got a table but I told 'm I wanted ta sit on the window sill an I did. Wore my green combat shirt, wrangler jeans, an John's blue jean jacket. I felt real great, put my round glasses on too. The singer was pretty shot. He was OK at the guitar but every song he sang sounded like the one he sang before that. Curled up on the window sill, the stained glass window opened, bars on the window, I gazed out the window a lot at the streets, that street is sorta a cobblestone effect an it really was so great. I fell in a deep mood.

8-30-66

To Avant Garde ALONE! There was spozed ta be poetry readin. I sat starin an weird. The poets were SORTA OK. Roger [redacted], a great beatnik poet that came to Pius for an assembly, was spozed ta be there but didn't show up til after I had to leave.

12-10-66

Spider John [redacted] was at the Avant Garde so at the las minute John an I went. Wore my cowboy stuff. The Spider was marvelous.

4-30-67

Headed for the Garde to see if it was open. The doors were open but when we got in, a boy waiter (about 23 yrs. old) asked if he could help us. We asked if they had anythin ta drink & he said he only had water, did we want some water? We accepted. A waitress, the waiter, John & I sat, the waiter played my guitar. They'd been at the Be-In, too. We all agreed it was better'n we expected it to be. We talked bout the guitar, the waiter told us they at the Garde had been blowin bubbles & it was really weird to see the color reflections on them from the stained glass window. Then two teenyboppers came up. The waiter mumbled, "Oh, no, the plague." Another waiter told them sorry, they're closed. I felt great. I was included. I was accepted. It was great. I am happy.

6-3-67

Ralph [my boyfriend] and I at the Garde. The band came in, real pills, ya know, shoulder-length hair, beads, real spazzes. Ralph LOVED 'm & sat up lookin & lissenin to 'm. I felt rotten. "The Velvet Whip" were AWFUL! A lotta electric noise. The singer had to read the words cuz he didn't know 'm & the tambourine player had NO rhythm & bashed it whenever he felt like it. UGH! I took an aspirin. Ralph thought they were wonderful. I said they were uncreative & noisy.

6-28-67

John & I went to the poetry readin at the Garde. I'm sure, all their poems were bout free sex, sex, open sex, public sex and nudity. I was really gettin sick.

7-25-67

Johnney & I went to the Garde by 6:45. At 7:30 Mr. [REDACTED], the owner, came & said he should give the key to us two, we could open up the place cuz we're always here first.

8-10-67

I decided this was my last visit to the Garde. The Whip played all weekend. The place is full of loudmouth babies, even Gordy looked shot. The place's changed so much, it's jus turned into a teenage hangout now.

8-15-67

Still very puzzled about this identity thing with the people at the Garde. I'm not like them, yet I am! I didn't go to their films cuz 1/4 of them are bare ladies & crap & it makes me sick. So does their poetry.

9-7-67

Just as I was going inside the Garde, Gordy stops me and asks if I go to school or am I out? I said, "I go to Pius," and "yeah, I'm straight." Bout 10 mins. later, Gordy's girl beckons for John to come downstairs and when he came back up, he asked me... "How'd you like to work here?" I almost fainted. That has been one of my long lost wishes - to work at the Garde. Gordy said they'll need someone to wash cups, sweep up, straighten the chairs, etc. So he asked John & I. Of COURSE we accepted. What an honor!

10-27-67

John & Gordy were talkin at the bottom of the Garde steps. They filed in, bout 20 of them, drunk teenyboppers. They went right up past Gordy, who yelled, "Get down here and pay." When they kept goin, he pushed up ahead of 'm & stopped. They pushed him & yelled & he pushed. They kept up & I pushed John, yellin, "go help him!" He did. They pushed some downstairs as I pulled some, pleadin, "Please don't start trouble here, please!" But they kept on. John & Gordy fought, later John told me some got upstairs but they began beating Gordy. John grabbed them & pushed them down the steps. They fought on the steps. Meanwhile downstairs 5 of them grabbed Eric, yelling "Hair boy" at him & got him down & beat him. I couldn't stand it. He was gettin hurt, my beautiful people of love, & I pushed thru, pullin them off of him. I remember cryin out, "What's the matter, are you insane?" They pushed him, knockin over Gordy's table. Someone had a handful of my hair pulled out. By then Gordy & John had them down & they pushed outside, me behind. About 7 of them chased 2 long-haired boys, one ran, the other stood in front of them & yelled, "OK, if you're gonna beat me up, go ahead." And they did--bad. They were all pullin & shovin him & I grabbed some arms & yelled, "Please, stop!" One picked him up and threw him on the sidewalk. I ducked down, grabbed him, someone grabbed me & the guy was free & he ran. Two grabbed the outside door & smashed one window after another with his fists & feet. I grabbed one's arm & pushed him into the other, still yellin, "Please, please stop!" They ran across the street to their cars, John, Lee & Gordy after them to get license nos. & I buried my hands in my face & cried. And Richard came over & put his arm around me, in his soft, beautiful, gentle voice said "It's OK." I cried & I didn't even know where to go & I had my arms around him, crying into his coat. Richard, oh, Richard. They pulled up the street and 4-5 came back up. Everyone ran back into the Garde. Richard pushed me in & I found myself later holding Ann & crying & she said, "It's OK, windows can be fixed. We have to show people like that we love them. They just don't understand. We can't hate them. They're just ignorant." I went outside, John, Richard, Gordy & Barker were cleaning up the broken glass. I kept thinkin bout the guy that got beat outside & I walked around 2 blocks trying to find him. When I got back 2 cops were talkin to John & Gordy & I went over & told John I thought I'd recognized one as Tim [REDACTED] Eric sat on the stair railing, staring sadly, expressionlessly. I asked if he was OK & he nodded & smiled & said yeah. The guy that got beat outside came back

looking for his glasses. I asked if he was OK & he kept sayin yeah. He looked OK. Said he'd been beat up before.

10-29-67

In the backroom of the Garde, Barker's wife asked if I'd like to work as a waitress on the weekends when they're real busy. Oh, I can't believe all this is true. "Of course!" I was just flying.

1-12-68

Before The Unit, a blues band, started at the Garde, Jim [REDACTED] & I went to the Indian Head.

1-27-68

I was waitressing and suddenly heard all this glass shattering downstairs. Gordy ran upstairs & said, "If anyone will help us, please come." No one went. I sat down & buried my face, ran to the backroom crying, looked out the window & saw 2 guys jump in a brown car. I yelled "Get the license" but someone said the lights were off it. John was soaking his bloody hand in the sink, blood all over his shirt and face. He said help Gordy, he's bleeding too. I ran downstairs & Gordy was standing there, blood all over his nose & mouth. The glass door was completely shattered all over the floor. I swept it up. In the kitchen I cried & Jim [REDACTED] held onto me & I cried in his shirt. John said it began when about a dozen guys came in and asked Gordy if there were any girls upstairs. Naturally Gordy didn't know what he wanted, so played it safe and said "I don't think so." Then the guy yelled, "Well, we're gonna close this place down!" and picked up Gordy's table and hit him with it. Poor Gordy. He never did nuthin to nobody & now he has to get hurt.

2-2-68

The Garde is like one big uptight mess. So glad Gordy isn't around there cuz I don't want anyone to hurt him. I've been thinking so much of the beautiful person he is. To me, Gordy is the model of the perfect man. Fully masculine. He is tall, straight. He does not talk much, when he does you know he is speaking for a real reason. When he laughs...Gordy has a real deep funny laugh...you have to smile & laugh too, just because he is laffing. You're so glad he is happy, you are too. And he's so gentle. When he & his girlfriend are together, there is yellow warmth all over. Gordy is all I want to be.

3-1-68

John was in court all day with Gordy and one of the guys they caught who busted up the Garde. The kid admitted the whole thing but got off with ABSOLUTELY nuthin. No probation, not even a warning. Just an "open case," which means the NEXT time they smash it up, they'll get trouble. FUCK. Then this pissin judge

ns to Gordy & says, "You don't have much longer to stay open" -
GALLY he said this, from the bench. Gordy was soooo mad. Can
you see the hassle if some freaks busted up a CYO dance? LIBERTY
AND JUSTICE FOR ALL. Fuck that!

4-6-68

Tod, the bouncer at the Garde, talked to me. Out of the sky, he
says, "How old are you, 17?" I said will be in June. He walked
out & said too bad.

4-12-68

Beautiful night at the Garde. John came by upstairs once & I took
his arm & said, "Wouldn't it be great to WORK here?" becuz it was
just like that. Like last summer when we were so in love with the
Garde, but didn't have it. And it seems so ironic that now I am
PAID to come there!

5-23-68

The big front window of the Garde was smashed again sometime
between 12-4 a.m. A bolt was thrown thru it. Gordy was fuming.
I guess they suspect the cops to have done it.

6-7-68

Robert Kennedy's casket stood in state at St. Patrick's Cathedral
& the public filed past it. Johnney [redacted] played at the Garde but
Walter [redacted] didn't show up. So Jim [redacted] played harmonica.

6-15-68

Got real snazzed up for the Garde. Put 2 dangling curls in my
hair & a big silk bow & tons of mascara like I used to wear, my
short dk blue skirt, white ruffle blouse, black nylons & patten-
leather shoes. I did look cute & when I got there, Gordy's
girlfriend almost died over how cute I looked. Barker said I
looked terrible, but I told him even if he thought I looked great
he wouldn't tell me, but he said yes he would. I got lots of
compliments & wondered what Gordy thought, but since his
girlfriend liked it so much, I figure they must get along in
tastes.

8-12-68

I just discovered tonight that the Garde is shutting down October
15. I guess the landlady raised the rent again on that date which
is when the lease is up for renewal. And they're so far in debt
now it's just too much. God, I don't know what I'm going to do
when it closes. I'll go crazy. My happiest times have been at
the Garde. I blame Milw for not keeping it up.

8-23-68

Gordy said the band that played yesterday got beat up outside the Garde. A city alderman told one of their fathers not to worry, that the Garde won't be open much longer if he can help it anyhow. Did that make Gordy mad!! He said this city is just a "police state."

9-7-68

Jim [redacted] took me to see his new apt. As we walked out of the Garde, Gordy stood outside alone & said to us, "You'll regret it in the end, you two." When we came back to the Garde, Gordy was outside again & I said to him, "We didn't regret it." He laffed.

9-28-68

The Whip played at the Garde and I began to realize for the first real time that next week is the last weekend the Garde is open....

10-12-68

Had a jam session at the Garde and Jim [redacted] played harmonica. And did he play!!!

10-17-68

The Garde was robbed the other day...guitars, mike heads, \$5,000 tape recording system, record player & transmitting unit for sound.

10-21-68

I told Jim [redacted] Gordy had given me the Garde's table lamp when the Garde closes & he said, "Yes, but look at the lamp he gave me, and I don't even have to wait til they close."

10-27-68

The last day of the Avant Garde. I spent all night in the kitchen alone washing dishes & Gordy came in, asked what I was gonna do now that they're closed. I said probably sit in my bedroom a lot. I went to the door & watched the Avant Garde & thought of the years I lived there... of Sleepy John [redacted] Bugle Blues, Big Joe [redacted] John and I, of the very beautiful people I had only dreamed of knowing, and Gordy made a point that Jim & I should visit him, and tears streamed down my cheeks. The end of one era, but the birth of a new and beautiful one...

91-7

Journal Excerpts 2-66

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GLC 2

GAY AND LESBIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Journal Excerpts, Feb., 1966; Typed Transcripts. Feb. 1966. MS Louis Graydon Sullivan Papers, 1755-1991: Record Group 1: Biographical and Personal Writings, Series 4. Diaries and Journals (1961-1991) Box 1 Folder 18/1.4. Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Historical Society. Archives of Sexuality and Gender, link.gale.com/apps/doc/IQZXYX412837551/AHSI?u=glbths&sid=bookmark-AHSI&pg=1. Accessed 24 Jan. 2025.