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**Q-NOTES COMMUNITY MATCH MAKER
PERSONALS**

You've come a long way, baby

UFMCC turns 30

by Wanda Pico
Special to Q-Notes

In the summer of 1968, one year prior to the Stonewall riots, a little-reported West Coast confrontation occurred between patrons of a gay bar and police. Although the situation didn't seem to warrant much attention at the time, it galvanized gay activists in Los Angeles and initiated a chain of events that directly led to the founding of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC).

The account of this uprising is a powerful and moving story which has never received adequate historical coverage. Yet, it forever changed the international struggle for gay and lesbian equality by virtue of its profound affect on one man: Rev. Troy Perry.

Within months of this event, Rev. Perry held the first worship service of UFMCC. Twelve worshipers gathered in his home in Huntington Park, CA at 1:30pm on October 6, 1968 — the first service of what today has become an international movement with more than 42,000 members and adherents in 15 countries, an annual income exceeding \$15 million, and a powerful message of spiritual acceptance and affirmation for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered persons.

Recounted below is the story, in Rev. Perry's own words, of the night that forever changed the face of GLBT spirituality.

Now is the time

I went dancing on a summer evening in 1968. With me was a slender, very attractive man named Tony Valdez who was about 22 and married. Tony and I had known each other for several months. Our shared interest was that both of us liked going to The Patch, a very large gay dance bar in Wilmington [CA], across the river from Long Beach and south of Los Angeles. I knew little about music, but Tony introduced me to La Bamba and taught me to enjoy fast dances. Popular were the Madison, the Monkey and the Jerk, which were primarily male chorus lines with loud music and dance routines that rivaled sweaty calisthenics.

Large, dramatically lit rooms were filled with cigarette smoke. People drank plenty of beer and behaved themselves better than many men and women in similar heterosexual establishments. The difference, however, was twofold. One, we were gay, and two, the people with power in Los Angeles, for many homophobic reasons, endorsed vicious policies generally used against us. The police, without fear of retribution, sometimes murdered homosexuals, but more often laughed at us as they attempted to ruin our lives. Gay dance bars and overtly gay enterprises, no matter how well they were managed, rarely were able to stay in business as long as a year during the 1960s.

The Patch, widely known as a "groovy" bar, was running out of time. The manager was Lee Glaze, a tall, fast-speaking blond who said loud and often, "I may be a queen, honey, but I'm going to stand up for my rights." When Lee said, "There's something around here I'm allergic to, and it's giving me an itch," his words were an obvious signal that plain-clothesmen had infiltrated the premises. A bar owner could be arrested for breaking police cover, but Lee never refrained. His reply to angry officers was,

"You're not here to do anything but harass us!"

The night Tony and I were dancing at The Patch was a dangerous evening. It seemed the music often stopped, either because uniformed police seemed to keep coming in and asking for people's identification, or because Lee needed to use the band's microphone to inform frightened customers that they had some constitutional rights and should not give in to gestapo tactics. Around midnight, many cautious customers had departed, but there were newcomers. Band music was loud. Scores of men were dancing as Tony went to the bar and purchased two beers, one for himself and one for me. When he returned to where I was standing, after about 90 seconds, a plainclothesman walked up to us and flashed a police badge into my face. "Follow me outside," he demanded.

"Are you talking to me?" I asked.

"Not you, him," snarled the officer, pointing to Tony.

Minutes later, Tony was charged with lewd and lascivious conduct, a standard but meaningless accusation used against homosexuals. It could mean anything, or nothing. In Tony's case, he had been in my field of vision the entire time when he went to the bar, and if he had done anything illegal, he would have needed to be a magician. Or I needed to have my eyes examined.

Nevertheless, in spite of all protests, Tony was handcuffed and pushed into one of many squad cars that, for some irrational reason, were parked in front of the bar with their red lights flashing. Tony was hauled off to jail accompanied by a 40-year-old man named Bill who was also in handcuffs. Bill was accused of being lewd with Tony although the older man had merely slapped the latter on the rump in a casual fashion (exactly the way football players do).

A few infuriating minutes after the patently discriminatory arrests, Lee Glaze again took a microphone away from the band. He made a rousing speech. "Two people who are totally innocent have just been arrested," Lee declared. "The cops are trying to put us out of business by keeping us frightened. I think all of us are familiar with the routine. We all know about harassment and entrapment. So let me tell you what we're going to do. We're going to fight! We have rights just like everybody else. Together we can beat the police-state tactics these lousy cops are using. We'll all go get Tony and Bill out on bail, and we'll carry bouquets of flowers to the jail, and we'll stand in the light so everybody will know we're no longer afraid! What do you say?"

Lee's words thrilled me. There were still police around, listening and scowling, but he did not care. It was all a great revelation. In those moments, I found courage within myself that I never knew existed. I suddenly realized that we, as gay people, could stand up and fight for our rights which had too long been denied.

I was already at the Harbor Jail when Lee arrived with a colorful procession of assertive, flower-bedecked homosexuals whom he led into the building. Imperiously, he announced to a shocked desk sergeant, "We are here to get our sisters out of jail!"

The moment was delicious, exciting and certainly memorable. But it faded. We stunned the police, standard-bearers of our oppression, but time was on their side. As the hours of night

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