

Sylvia Rivera, 50, Figure in Birth of the Gay Liberation Movement

By DAVID W. DUNLAP

Sylvia Rivera, who helped lead the charge — in makeup and full voice — at the birth of the modern gay liberation movement, died yesterday at St. Vincent's Manhattan Hospital. She was 50 and lived in Brooklyn.

The cause was liver cancer, said the Rev. Pat Bumgardner of the Metropolitan Community Church of New York, where Ms. Rivera was coordinator of the food pantry.

"I'm not missing a minute of this — it's the revolution!" Ms. Rivera shouted to her lover on the morning of June 28, 1969, when patrons of the Stonewall Inn violently rebuffed a police raid, setting a new militant

tone for the gay rights movement.

Having been initiated into prostitution on 42nd Street as a boy (she was born Ray Rivera), she worried about "kids who started to hustle on the streets, as she had, at age 10 or 11 and, within a few years, were dead from a stabbing or an overdose or were locked into dead-end lives," Martin Duberman wrote in "Stonewall" (Dutton, 1993).

With Marsha P. Johnson, Ms. Rivera opened a short-lived shelter on East Second Street called STAR House, for Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries.

Ms. Rivera often tangled with gay political leaders who favored a more conventional public front. When the

Gay Activists Alliance eliminated transvestites from its civil rights agenda in the early 70's, she turned on the group, Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney wrote in "Out for Good" (Simon & Schuster, 1999). "Hell hath no fury like a drag queen scorned," she warned.

But she became less of a force to be reckoned with as she slipped into drug addiction, hustling and homelessness. By the early 1990's, she was living on a pier in the West Village.

Five years ago, however, she found a home at Transy House, a private shelter for transgendered people in Park Slope, Brooklyn, patterned on STAR House. There, she met her partner, Julia Murray, who

was with her yesterday at her death.

Over the years, there were reconciliations with the mainstream gay rights movement. In 1994, Ms. Rivera was given a place of honor in the march marking the 25th anniversary of Stonewall.

"The movement had put me on the shelf, but they took me down and dusted me off," she said in a 1995 interview with The New York Times. "Still, it was beautiful. I walked down 58th Street and the young ones were calling from the sidewalk, 'Sylvia, Sylvia, thank you, we know what you did.' After that I went back on the shelf. It would be wonderful if the movement took care of its own. But don't worry about Sylvia."