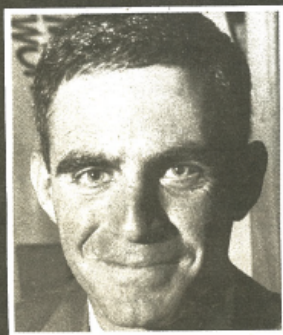


PART II

Equal rights pickets
outside the White
House in May, 1965;
below, author Eric
Marcus



The Fight For Gay Rights

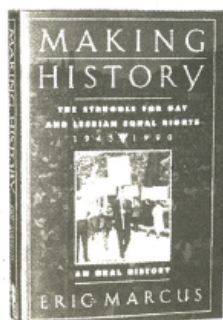
It didn't begin with New York's Stonewall riots in 1969. In his new book, Eric Marcus interviews 50 Americans who fought for equality, from 1945 to 1990.

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Struggling

Finding Their People In Books



June is Gay Pride Month, but not everyone's celebrating. 'Yeah, you gay people have rights,' a talk-show caller told author Eric Marcus. 'You have the right to be chained to a truck and dragged down the road.'

ERIC MARCUS READ his first gay book, a Reader's Digest Condensed version, in the mid 1970s, in Dr. Teitelbaum's waiting room in Kew Gardens. He was not yet 16, and he kept looking up nervously as he flipped through the pages of "Consenting Adult" by Laura Z. Hobson, the author who decades earlier had written "Gentleman's Agreement."

"I thought, Jesus," Marcus recalls, "these are the same feelings I have."

Many of the people Marcus has gone on to profile in "Making History" had similar experiences. Decades earlier, Barbara Gittings had tried to "find my people. [And] the first place I found them was in books."

But the books then, says Jim Kepner, were "terribly depressing." Homosexuals "were written about as if they were all lined up in pickle jars on a shelf."

The experience is far less sour for a new generation. The Publishing Triangle, an association of homosexuals in publishing, has named June the First Annual National Lesbian and Gay Book Month, and they have plenty of documentation to back up their designation. There are so many books available now that the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center on 13th Street has a lending library (which recently celebrated its first anniversary), open three days a week, with about 5,000 volumes. (San Francisco's new Main Library will have a lesbian and gay collection of at least 10,000 volumes.)

In the past three or four years, mainstream and university presses have jumped into a field which was in the past reserved for small specialized publishing houses. Both Columbia and New York University presses, for example, have created a gay series, and St. Martin's Press has published more than 60 gay titles in the past 15 years.

A Different Light, a national gay bookstore chain, opened its first store in 1979, carrying 1,100 titles. Now its three stores, including one in New York, carry 14,000 titles — more than half from general publishers and big university presses.

It's not just the number of titles, but how much they sell. "Tales of the City" by Armistead Maupin has sold 600,000 copies. "The Easy Way Out," the new novel by Stephen McCauley, and "Love, Zena Beth," by Diane Salvatore, have both been made selections of the Book-of-the-Month Club.

Here is a list of the top 10 gay / lesbian best sellers (fiction and nonfiction; hardcover and paperback) of the past decade, ranging from 600,000 to 25,000 copies sold, according to A Different Light's Richard Labonté:

1. "Tales of the City" by Armistead Maupin
2. "Rubyfruit Jungle" by Rita Mae Brown
3. "Dancer From the Dance" by Andrew Holleran
4. "Curious Wine" by Katherine Forrester
5. "Mayor of Castro Street" by Randy Shilts
6. "Celluloid Closet" by Vito Russo
7. "This Bridge Called My Back" by Gloria Anzaldua
8. "City of Night" by John Rechy
9. "Desert of the Heart" by Jane Rule
10. "Permanent Partners" by Betty Berzon

— Mandell



Eric Marcus, right, reads a passage from his new book "Making History" with his mother Cecilia Marcus, left.

Terrance James

Still

45

PART II NY

By Jonathan Mandell
STAFF WRITER

IT WAS THE KIND of event you could bring your mother to, if you were Eric Marcus, who also brought his grandmother, and aunts and uncles and old friends, and new heroes. They were all at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center, sitting near the front of the first floor auditorium, earlier in Gay History Month.

In New York City, June is now officially Lesbian and Gay Pride and History Month. It commemorates — as do dozens of such official observances around the world — a couple of days of riots 23 years ago on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village. The riot was a reaction to a police raid of yet another bar that was, in the parlance of the time, frequented by homosexuals. This one was called the Stonewall Inn.

Now, Marcus, 33 years old, was standing before a well-dressed crowd just a few blocks uptown from Stonewall, armed with 45 years of gay history, all between the covers of his new book.

"I'd never been comfortable with the concept of gay pride, either politically or personally," he told the crowd. "It's something I am by nature. It's not something I accomplished, like graduating from college." He feels differently, now that he has spent the past three years flying across the country conducting interviews for "Making History" (Harper Collins), a mammoth oral history of the struggle for gay and lesbian equal rights since 1945.

The stories are told by 49 activists, role models, and straight supporters — self-proclaimed rabble-rousers and cautious scientists, anonymous clerks who still insist on using pseudonyms and such celebrated figures as Dear Abby ("Any therapist who would take a gay person and try to change him or her should be in jail") and the Rev. John Shelby Spong, the Episcopal Bishop of Newark ("It was . . . clear to me that the gay rights movement was overwhelmingly a justice issue").

Eric Marcus called his mother Cecilia up to the podium to help tell the story of one mother and her gay son. They began reading from the book as if it were a play, Eric reading the words of the son, named Morty Manfred, and Cecilia the words of Morty's mother, Jeanne.

Jeanne Manfred was a teacher in PS 32 in Flushing, which her son Morty had attended. Marcus went to PS 99 in Kew Gardens. Morty witnessed the Stonewall riot and became active in the movement, which resulted in his being arrested, despised, and once, beaten up by Michael May, the president of the firefighters union. "At the trial that followed, although everybody identified him as my assailant, he wasn't convicted," said Morty (read by Eric).

"I was furious," said Jeanne (read by Eric's mother). "I remember thinking, what right have they got to assault my son and the others?"

Jeanne wrote a letter to the editor. It was published. Her own activism, fueled by a mother's fury, had begun. She marched with her son in one of the first Gay Pride Parades. She started a group for parents, which grew into P-FLAG, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. "The irony of course, is that I considered myself such a traditional person," Jeanne said. "I didn't even cross the street against the light."

Cecilia looked up from the transcript. "Sounds a lot like me." (She too is now active in P-FLAG.)

When they finished reading the chapter, Marcus pointed to Jeanne Manfred in the front row. The crowd gave her a standing ovation.

"As most of you know," Eric added, "Morty died last week." Morty, 41, died of AIDS.

"Morty got to see his chapter in the book," Jeanne said privately. "His niece read it to him."

"Every civil rights movement needs its heroes," Eric Marcus says. "We had ours. We just didn't know who they were."

City's Stonewall Inn," reads the first line of "Making History." There were, Marcus writes, "many earlier confrontations, breakthroughs, and defining moments."

"There's a sense that whoever came before didn't do anything," Marcus says in person. "Queer Nation [the militant gay activist group] thinks they invented In-Your-Face activism. They think that, because they miss the historical context."

The book begins with Lisa Ben, who still uses a pseudonym (an anagram for Lesbian). She was a secretary for a movie company in 1947 when she started one of the first gay publications, VICE VERSA. This was nothing more than 10 copies of a single sheet of paper she typed secretly at her office on five pieces of carbon paper, and distributed furtively to her friends. (She was afraid of being arrested.) "I venture to predict," she wrote in the fourth issue, "that there will be a time in the future when gay folk will be accepted as part of regular society."

The book ends with Nancy Andrews and Cecelia Whitehall, a young lesbian couple in Virginia, who give speeches to college students and talk of their relationship as "modeled along marriage-like lines." Says Whitehall: "I don't think we're very happy now with the status of gay rights, which is to say they don't exist."

"They don't think they have any rights because they can't get a joint membership at the Y," Marcus says with something approaching a smirk. "They didn't know how people like Lisa Ben had to live. The difference is so profound."

MANY OF THE stories in "Making History" are both profound and surprising, stories told from Alaska and Idaho, California and New York, by a drag queen, a right-wing businessman, a career military man discharged from the Navy and now an artist in Soho, an ex-nun, a radical feminist, a conservative congressman, a CNN anchorman, and a professional football player.

In 1919, a black attorney sent his 15-year-old adopted son, accompanied by the boy's mother, to the Mayo Clinic because the boy was not expressing interest in girls. The two had to eat crackers and stay in

tents during the trip because no restaurants or hotels would accept black people. The doctors determined that he was homosexual, and said that state law required that he be put in jail. But they decided not to refer him to the police. They also said "there was nothing they could do for me," the son says in the book.

His parents accepted it. Years later, having become a lawyer himself, he joined the Mattachine Society, one of the first organized gay rights groups. He is now nearly 90, alone, and still afraid to have his name used, or even mention the state he lives in.

In the early 1950s, an employee of Boeing was followed into a gay bar by an FBI agent who had been investigating her. "He said 'You're just lucky.' And I asked why. He said 'Because I'm gay myself, otherwise you would have been out of your job immediately.'" Indeed, an astronomer named Frank Kameny who was dismissed from his government job said that "homosexuality had been a theme" of the McCarthy witchhunting hearings, but "it was not widely reported" because "the word *homosexual* was not fit to print or discuss or be heard."

Times certainly have changed. Homosexuality is now such a staple on talk shows that, Marcus says, he has had some trouble getting booked on them. "Plain old pedestrian homosexuality no longer elicits much excitement."

But neither, Marcus believes, does it now elicit widespread acceptance. "In all of Western Europe, there are no laws against homosexuality," he says. "In the U.S., half the states still outlaw homosexual acts." He says he is writing another book called "Answers to the 300 Most Frequently Asked Questions About Gay and Lesbian People," collected from the press tour for his first book, "The Male Couple's Guide." What were the three most frequently asked questions?

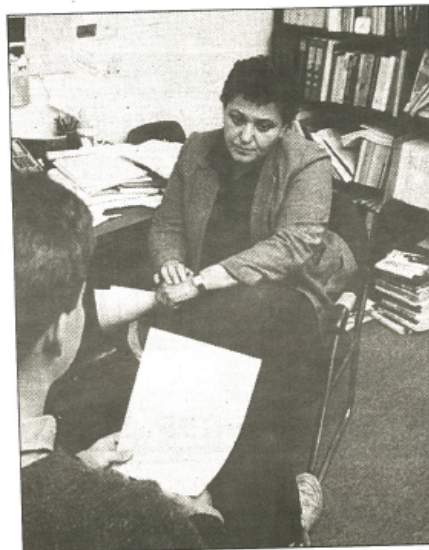
"Who plays the husband, who plays the wife?"

"Is it a choice?"

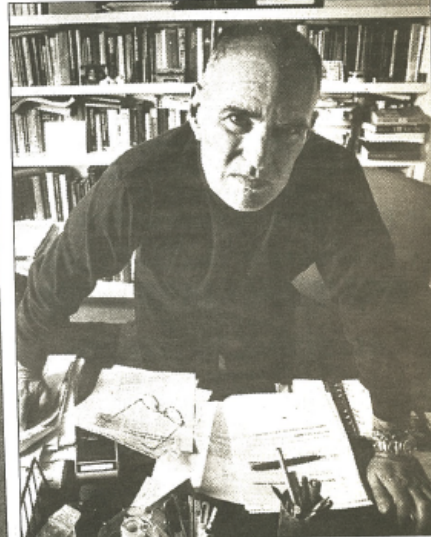
"Do gay parents raise gay children?"

"I was on a radio call-in show when a caller said 'Yeah, you gay people have rights. You have the right to be chained to a truck and dragged down the road.'" But for every caller like that, he says, there

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Newsday / Mark Hingston



Newsday / J. Conrad Williams Jr.

Joyce Hunter, left, is head of Harvey Milk School, an alternative public high school; Larry Kramer, right, helped found ACT UP, an AIDS activist group. Both are featured in the new book, "Making History," by Eric Marcus.

"The struggle for gay and lesbian equal rights did not begin on June 28, 1969, with a riot at New York

Struggling Still For Gay Rights

HISTORY from Page 45

were half a dozen from young people saying "I just fell in love. What should I do?" Gay kids have nobody to ask these questions of."

Almost nobody. During his talk at the gay center, Marcus pointed in the audience to Joyce Hunter, one of about a dozen New Yorkers featured in the book. Hunter was born in a home for unwed mothers in Staten Island, the daughter of a black father and an orthodox Jewish mother. She spent much of her childhood in an orphanage, tried to kill herself several times, got married and had children before she finally accepted her lesbianism.

A school drop-out, she was asked to be the spokesperson for the gay organization at Hunter College because all the students were too afraid about their careers to be so open. This led her to counseling young people in her spare time. She made her living as an apprentice chef.

Then, one day on her way home from work, she was brutally attacked by three men who made anti-lesbian remarks. She looks back on the event almost with fondness now. "It changed my whole life." No longer able to work as a chef because of her injuries, she was sent to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. They tested her to see what she could be trained for, and concluded, "You're college material." Hunter, now completing her PhD in social work, is the head of the Harvey Milk School, an official alternative public high school for lesbian and gay students named after a gay supervisor killed by another supervisor in San Francisco. It is part of the Hetrick-Martin Institute, which councils gay youth, and includes a telephone hotline.

"You know," she says in the book, "I remember what it was like to be a teenager with nobody to talk to about this issue. This is one of the reasons I'm so committed to this work."

Not too many are. "There are 24 million gay people out there, and the biggest gay organization has no more than 15,000 to 25,000 gay people on a mail-

ing list," Larry Kramer says in "Making History." A New Yorker, Kramer, now HIV-positive himself, helped found both Gay Men's Health Crisis, the largest AIDS service organization, and ACT UP, the militant AIDS activist group. "We have surprisingly few rights and surprisingly little power for the numbers that we represent."

Marcus himself had no intention of becoming one of the committed activists. The son of a Queens postal worker and a part-time secretary, he made his stellar way through Russell Sage Junior High School in Forest Hills and Hillcrest High School in Jamaica before going on to Vassar College and Columbia Journalism School — his elite education, he says, the direct result of a family tragedy. When he was 12, his father had committed suicide, an act deemed related to experiences during World War II, and therefore qualifying Eric for veterans' benefits.

In the 10 years after college, he says, he held more than 30 jobs. "I tried all kinds of things. I hated everything." His work included six weeks as a speechwriter for Queens Borough President Donald Manes ("I went back into the closet for that"), and several years as an associate producer at both CBS' "This Morning" and ABC's "Good Morning America" (where he returned recently as a guest to promote the book).

The book has helped him become even more open about his homosexuality, introducing his "spouse" of nine years, Barry Owens (they live in San Francisco), and bringing his grandmother to his talks. "I've always been a bad liar," he explains. "To be in the closet, you've got to be a very good liar."

"My grandmother said, 'Why do you have to tell everybody?' She knew I wasn't going to change — she watches 'Donahue.' But why publicize it? I told her that people can deal with me, I'm presentable, people can deal with what I have to say, I have a responsibility to talk about this."

"I hate the politics. Some activists are so vicious. They have so much anger they direct it at each other. But this is a subject that very much affects my own life. I'd love to hold hands with my spouse without thinking twice about it."

"You know, I thought being gay would ruin my life. And look what happens. It's become my career." / ■