

STONEWALL
By Kim Langridge 2019

Every movement has a beginning. A birthplace. A flashpoint where history can say, "There – that's when it all started." It could be a creek in Wounded Knee. Or a bridge in Selma. Ours was a bar in Lower Manhattan. It was called Stonewall.

Stonewall.

It was known to all as a place for us.

A safe harbor in NYC.

For all our huddled masses yearning to breathe free.

To be you and me – whether L or G or B or T.

To the cops, it was just a bar.

But for us, it was a bridge too far.

Like Selma in '65.

And some of us are still alive to tell the story.

Our story. Her story. History.

Where it all began.

With a woman they tried to call a man.

When they tossed her like trash in the back of a van.

When they launched a raid on our parade.

It was June 28, 1969.

A vice squad cop named Seymore Pine

Made a decision from the Public Morals Division that enough was enough.

It was time to get tough and slap the cuffs on these fags.

So at 1:20 in the morning, without any warning

He slipped into 53 Christopher Street.

The Stonewall Inn – it wasn't even his beat.

But beat he would, if he got the chance.

And while we laughed and we drank and we sang and we danced

Seymore made the call.

The whistles blew and the floor lights flashed.

And all the patrons made a dash for the sidewalk.

All but one.

A badass drag king woman named Stormé

Stood her ground – our ground – and said

"No way.

Not today.
Screw this raid.
It shouldn't matter if you're straight or gay.
This is the land of the free and the home of the brave.
Well, isn't it?"

Not a word was spoken as Seymore's crew
Shackled Stormé's wrists while the boys in blue
Brought the paddy wagon 'round.

And as the bystanders gawked from the safety of the sidewalk
Stormé shouted and shook, "Why don't you guys do something?"
And that's all it took.

Six words and a question mark.
But there wasn't any question that day.
Transgender, lesbian, bi and gay
We answered with an exclamation point.
A flashpoint.
A turning point.
We came together.
And something changed forever.

We fought them off and they called it a riot.
We made a stand and they called us a mob.
Called us faggots and homos and queerass slobs.
They locked up our bars.
Then they locked us behind their bars, and said they won.
But they were wrong.
Because at that moment
We became one.

Now, it's fifty years later, and here we all are.
Gathered together to look back.
To look forward.
To look at each other with pride.
And to smile.

And if you like what you see
And if you're proud of you
Like I'm proud of me
Always remember what happened back then
June 28, 1969 at The Stonewall Inn.