

Novice 101- Sistory of the World Pt.1

Updated through 06/22/2017

As Presented by

Sister Flirtatious Romanovsky of Middlesex
Toronto Order of Perpetual Indulgence (1983)

NOVICE 101 - SISTORY

1979

Dates and names, while interesting, need to be placed into context. Most of you no doubt know the basic story of The First Manifest:

Easter Weekend (04/14/79) is celebrated as the founding of the Order.

As a post, making its way around Facebook puts it:

Picture it: San Francisco, 1979. The world's gayest city at the time was filled with a community of gay men seeking to conform at a hypermasculine sexual stereotype. Bored with this atmosphere, three men went out into the streets to challenge the world: they went in full, traditional habits through the streets of the city and down to the nude beach. They were met with shock and amazement, but captured everyone's interest.

Back in Toronto in the '80s we called them “clones” - wearing plaid [often flannel] shirts, jeans and facial hair in a style resembling a lumberjack, or modern-day hipsters.

The three who made that excursion were:

Ken Bunch, (wearing whiteface, as he'd been doing for photographic studies)
Fred Brungard,
Bruce (Barouch) Golden.

The Second Manifest was an exhibition game between the Gay Softball League and the SFFD:

Two Sisters showed up as unofficial, and uninvited, cheerleaders:

Ken Bunch, joined this time by
Edmund “Agnes” Garron.

The Third Manifest was on 08/19/79, at the Castro Street Fair:

This was the first use of Sisterly names, and these are considered the Four Founders.
Ken Bunch (as *Sister Adhanarisvara*),
Fred Brungard (as *Sister Missonary Position*),
Agnes Garron (as *Sister Solicitation*),
Bill Graham (as *Rev. Mother*).

About 10 days later, on Labour Day weekend, the 1st International Faerie Gathering was held in Arizona, attended by:

Agnes Garron (now *Sister Hysterectoria*),
Bill Graham

The Radical Faerie influence varies from House to House, but is undeniable.

As Mama Mish wrote to me;

“Billy(RevMother) and Agnes attended that first national spiritual conference Harry and others called and it provided both inspiration and recruits to our fledgling sister's group. i attended that second gathering in Colorado in 1980 where i first met Harry and John. Seven of us attended that one. and a majority of our original fifteen sisters were rad faes. We also met poet James Broughton in Colorado and he became an even closer mentor to the sisters.” [1]

Harry Hay (1912-2002)

A founder of the Mattachine Society (the first sustained gay rights group in the USA) and of the Radical Faeries. He was born in England but raised in various countries. An avowed Marxist, he was forced out of the Mattachine once his communist beliefs were considered a threat to the movement. See also my blog post on "*The Temperamentals*" for more information on Harry Hay (links at the end)

James Broughton (1913-1999) my favourite JB quote is "*Follow Your Own Weird*":

"*A pre-Beat-era poet, underground filmmaker, lover, gay man and artist who dared to live boldly and experiment wildly*" [2] he was also *Sister Sermoneta of the Flying Phallus*. See the documentary "Big Joy". You may've seen the promotional image from the doc that is of Mish jumping in SF

Winter 1979-80

At a meeting generally said to have been held in December (but could have been Nov or Jan.) the name Order of Perpetual Indulgence and the core mission: *Spreading Universal Joy* and *Expiating Stigmatic Guilt* were selected.

Some Terminology

OPI = Order of Perpetual Indulgence. The original US registered trademark, now expired. With the new trademark SPI applicable to US (and Canadian) Houses, OPI usually now designates the Houses of Perpetual Indulgence outside of North America.

SPI = Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. The active US registered trademark- to be used only by 'fully professed houses' (and their active membership) who have signed the UNPC's terms of use.

UNPC = United Nuns Privy Council. Tasked with supervising Missions and Houses of OPI in North America, and protecting the US-registered SPI trademark. Formed in 2006, it consists of representatives from each approved Mission and House in North America.

Nuns of the Above Refers to any Sister of Perpetual Indulgence who has 'crossed through the veil' and moved on to whatever awaits on the other side.

1980

⌘ In March the SF House added Activism to the Order's purpose as they marked the 1st anniversary of the near-disaster at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant. They performed the "Rosary in Time of Nuclear Peril" Quoting *Sister Isa Dora Knocking's* blog:

"En route the Sisters did humorous pom pom routines alternating with a Rosary in Time of Nuclear Peril, *setting up the poles of our public ministry: outrageous camp humor and thoughtful spiritual purpose.*" (emphasis added) [3]

⌘ Also during 1980, Gary, an Australian on an extended vacation in USA, travels to SF from LA, where he'd interviewed Harry Hay and other RadFae. He attends the 1980 RadFae gathering in Colorado with Mish and others. He enters a novitiate with SF House as *Sister Gazella Gardenia* before returning to Australia. Upon his return he hears about another gay man manifesting as *Sister Volupta*, although not apparently aware of the SF House. After they meet Volupta changes her name to *Mother Inferior* and the two set up the Sydney House of OPI. The Australian OPI website lists a November 1981 event as their first Manifest.

1981

⌘ SF House presents a **Dog Show** as the first known **fundraiser** for People with AIDS.

⌘ Eight gay men in Toronto, inspired by the SF House, establish the **Toronto Order of Perpetual Indulgence**. The Order's first manifest is at the June Pride Festival and March; the Sisters perform an **Exorcism** when the March passes 52 Division (Police precinct).

After that first manifestation Sister Mary Media, a member of the San Francisco Mother House and a Toronto native visited and, in the words of Founding Sister Missionary Position "*brought word back to the mother house you were A OK*" [4]

Sister Florida Naranja (1958-2008), founding Sister, is believed to be the **first Filipino OPI Sister**. The last five active Sisters **disband the Chapter** as of October, 1986 under community criticism that they were "*Ruining it For Everyone*" – a phrase that's become a tag line the SF House likes to use. *Sr Flaggelation of Forbidden Fruit* (one of the last 5) would later move to Columbus OH.

⌘ *Sister Frieda Peoples* joins the SF House as the first **African-American** Sister OPI.

⌘ Three various groups attempt to establish an OPI presence in **Denver Colorado**. Although that was the site of the 2nd International Faerie Gathering, nun of the groups are able to maintain a foothold. However, out of those groups sprang *Sister Who Does She Think She Is*. Although *Sister Who* no longer uses OPI or SPI in their biography, they continue to Minister in CO and CT. Mish told me they would meet "*when he attended major anniversaries in Sf. I believe the 30th was the last time i saw and spoke with him*" and that Who "*for most of these years has been a solo sister in solidarity.*" [5]

@ See Addendum 12/03/16 for further information on the various early convents in Denver, CO.

⌘ There is now an Aspirant group in Colorado, so the Sisters may soon be seen doing a "*Sound of Music*" style photo-shoot. Not sure if Mish is willing to replicate the JOY jump in the Rockies.

1982

⌘ SF House publishes "Play Fair" - first safe(r) sex pamphlet.

1983

⌘ SF House presents the first known candlelight vigil for those lost to hiv/aids.

⌘ Founder Kenneth takes on the name *Sister Vicious Power Hungry Bitch* (aka Vish)

⌘ As a sidenote - The 3 surviving founders prefer the following terminology:

"Grandma Vish; Mama Mish; and Agnes, Founding Sis" [6]

1984

⌘ SF House - After 3 of the 4 founders dropped out of active participation membership which had grown to over 3 dozen falls to half a dozen. During this "keyhole period" (Vish's term), 'whiteface' is mandated for members. Also Sister Mysteria of the Holy Order of the Broken Hymen joins as the first biological female Sister. She joins the Nuns of the Above in 2011, after 27 years of service.

⌘ Late in 1984 or early '85, *Sister Mish* settles in Tennessee- although she does return to SF for various events.

1987

⌘ After some rather public expressions of discontent, resulting in the televised schism (aka “*war of the drag queens*”) court-ordered arbitration results in the SF House incorporating and trademarking OPI. This makes clear the ongoing tension between “procedure” and “practise”.

⌘ *Sr Theresa Nervana* from San Francisco sets up the first **Seattle Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence**.

1989

⌘ Sisters from SF House travel to Seattle, creating the ritual of Exequator to recognize another House.

⌘ Agnes (*Sister Hysterectoria*) moves to NYC. In December she leads over a dozen new faerie Sisters as part of the ACT UP protest at St Patrick's Cathedral. The **NYC (dis)Order of Perpetual Indulgence** is born.

1990

⌘ *Sr Vish* and 2 others travel to Paris and found the first **French House**. The first manifest 09/11/90 includes 4 Parisian founders with the three SF Sisters.

⌘ The three SF Sisters visit Berlin and manifest as **the Berlin wall falls**.

⌘ One or more Missionaries from Australia visit the United Kingdom, establishing the **London House**. The House undergoes a number of deaths & resurrections, during which many records are lost.

⌘ In Toronto Brad (*Sister Merry Peter*) reads about the now-defunct Toronto House. Inspired, he leads the first effort to revive the Order in Toronto. His dedication is recognized by Mama Mish, who affectionately calls MP “*the rogue nun from the provinces*”. Although large of heart, and a self-described “*thick-headed Irish nun*” she was not able to re-establish a House. MP moves to San Francisco where she took vows in the Mother House.

⌘ See “*Bad Habits*” on Vimeo for an interview with *Merry Peter*. MP will be an influence on the Vancouver House (2010), Toronto Missions and Montreal convent (2016).

1990s

Additional OPI Houses are founded throughout Germany, France and the UK.

⌘ In California, the **Los Angeles House** is founded in 1995

⌘ Columbia Sisters are founded in 199(2) or (5) - (last known activity ~2004)

⌘ *Archmother Johanna*, resident of Heidelberg, reads about the SF House. She manifests at an AIDS event 09/21/1991. The Heidelberg House is formally established 04/30/1992. Archmother later moves to Berlin (a Berlin House was founded May 1993). The two Houses combine and the new Berlin House is the **Mother House of the German-speaking order**.

@ See Addendum 3 for one member's memories of the early German Order, as well as the beginning of the Guard tradition in Germany and the USA. Dates in that note differ from the above; further clarification is needed.

Seattle Sisters

In July of 1996 a schism results in 8 Sisters leaving to establish The Abbey of St. Joan (*House of the Blessed B-Cup*) - the current SPI House in Seattle. The original group goes inactive within a year or two.

In June of 2009 Sister Theresa Nervana is talked out of retirement, and establishes **SOMHOW** (Sisters of the Mother House of Washington). Although some animosity may remain with older Sisters, relations between SOMHOW and SPI are mostly cordial.

⌘ Mama Mish recognizes SOMHOW, Catholic Sisters, Sister Who and any others who strive for the same goals as “*sisters in solidarity*”.

2000s

⌘ Perpetual Indulgence becomes the “hot new” organization that's already over 20 years old. Abbeys pop up from Birmingham, Alabama to Salt Lake City, Utah. Dozens of new Houses in North America are recognized over the past 15 years, with half a dozen or so Missions like The Columbus Sisters in the works.

⌘ Texas and Florida each have 3 houses, while California has 5. By 2011 France, Germany & Australia each have 4 full Houses and the British Isles have 5 (counting Ireland).

⌘ In February 2010, an aspirant group is founded in Vancouver, BC. August 4, 2012 the **Abbey of the Long Cedar Canoe** become the first Canadian House in 25 years.

A Single Sister in Columbus:

Sister Flagg moved to Columbus early in 1996 but was preoccupied with mundane life matters for the first 15 years. In April of 2011, recovering from being laid off a professional sales career, Flagg registered and set-up a website (and connected Facebook Page) to host such historical documents as she had from the original Toronto Order. This website includes a re-issue of the Toronto Order's Songbook (and added Solstice lyrics) with parody songs; some historical and others still relevant.

In 2012 Sr Flagg reached out to the UNPC . As part of the conversation, he was made aware of the Cleveland Mission House, and corresponded with them. In March of 2014, *Sister Flaggelation of Forbidden Fruit* engaged in a time-honoured OPI tradition and adopted a new Sister name.

On Saturday, July 26, 2014 two Sisters and a Guard from the Rock 'N Roll Sisters (Cleveland Mission, later Full House) traveled to Columbus to manifest at the annual OVR Leather Competition weekend. Although Sister Flirt was not able to manifest, or spend much time with them, he did meet the traveling nuns at the leather event. Unknown to Flirt or the visiting sisters, that manifest was the seed that germinated into *The Abbey of Cardinal Sins: The Columbus Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence*.

Sister Flirt joined The Columbus Sisters; manifesting, serving as first Mistress of Novices, and aiding the group in working to full membership in the US Order. He resigned from that organization in March of 2017. A desire to maintain her independence as a Guerilla Nun in the tradition of the Toronto Order and concerns over systemic issues led him to join the ranks of Sisters in Solidarity.

NOTES:

- [1] Personal correspondence with Sister Mish, 07/20/15. Quoted at <http://briangryphon.com/2015/07/the-temperamentals/>
- [2] <http://bigjoy.org/twirl/james-story/>
- [3] <https://thesisterisadoraknocking.wordpress.com/2014/06/11/history-of-the-rosary-and-the-spi-rosary/>
- [4] <http://sistersOPItoronto.ca>
- [5] Personal correspondence with Sister Mish. 07/07/16
- [6] Facebook comment 05/28/16:

Sister Soami deLux:

“about that Grandmother/granny sobriquet, Vish is really into it, me not so much tho i like Mother, and Agnes cares for neither even though she's the oldest mother of us all”

Brian Gryphon (Sr Flirt):

“Ah so Grandma Vish, Mama Mish and Agnes, Founding Sis. Got it”

LINKS:

- The San Francisco (“Mother”) House <http://thesisters.org>
- The Australian Houses <http://www.universaljoy.com.au/>
- Documentary “Bad Habits” <https://vimeo.com/57347248>
- Documentary “Big Joy” <http://bigjoy.org>
- Documentary “Hope Along The Wind” <http://www.harryhay.com>

ADDENDUM - December 3, 2016

1. Further to the entry in 1981, regarding the early Sisterhood in Colorado:

"I founded the Denver House in September of 1981. Sr. Mish/Soami was our guiding muse- though they asked that we choose another name than Perpetual Indulgence- so we chose *Sisters of Erotic Affirmation*. We started with 5 Sisters and ended up with 8. After 3 trying years, we sort of petered out - Sisters Ruth Less and Alice B. Tactless took over after I left for San Francisco. After they moved st SF, Sr. Who (the Hell Does She Think She is) took over and renamed the *Order the Sisters of Incessant Revelation*. She eventually asked to have that Order removed from the SPI aegis. Sr. Who still lives there and manifests of occasion at global SPI events. The owner of Charlie's was going to fly a group of us out to Denver a few years ago in hopes of creating an event that would draw interest into forming another Denver House, but it never came to fruition"

Recollections of Sister Lilith of the Valley (née Sister Lily White of the Superior Posterior) as posted on Facebook by Sister EvelynTensions, founder of numerous Mission Houses and amateur genealogist.

2. Canadian Sisters/Souers in the 21st Century:

The Abbey of the Long Cedar Canoe (Vancouver BC house) and the Toronto Sisters of JOY (Jubilant Order of York) Mission are organized under the auspices of the UNPC. The convent of the Sisters of Montreal (*Les Soeurs de Montréal*) are part of the French Order of Perpetual Indulgence. The Montreal convent recognizes and honours the influence of Sister Mish as a founder of SPI/OPI, Sister Merry Peter (see also **1990**, page 5) and other Elders and Supporting Sisters from the USA and France.

ADDENDUM - December 7, 2016

3. Founding of the German Order

The German Sisters were founded in Heidelberg on Belthane 1994 by Mother Johanna Tyranna. Unlike the Mother House of San Francisco where SPI was seeded from and grew around a few people, the German Sisters pre-existed as a rather large group prior to becoming SPI. We were a circle of spiritual gay men who held Pink Masses and performed Energy Circles at sacred Celtic locations in our neighbourhood. We did a little healing and a lot of chanting. But we also had immense fun going out. We named ourselves GAYA, an amalgam of Gay and Gaia, the Greek goddess personifying Earth.

We were loosely associated with the Radical Faeries and held healing workshops. During the GAYA years I became friends with Andrew Ramer who was then a spiritual writer (*Two Flutes Playing*) and who introduced me into meditation and spiritual healing.

When Johanna found out and read a lot about SPI, GAYA morphed into the Sisters. There was not much of a difference because we already worked for a community to which AIDS became increasingly important. What changed, it seemed, was the appearance: the habit and the coronet. We modeled our order largely on the San Francisco one and followed their lead.

Source: *Sistory of the Guard Tradition as written by Guard Ambrosio de Membro Sancto* (Facebook)