

Firebombing Remains a Rubble

Judith Miller

Muriel "Mac" McCann, manager of the recently fire-bombed Mor or Les women's bar in St. Louis, Missouri, was finally cleared of the arson charge thrown at her for allegedly blowing her own tavern up.

Citing lack of evidence, the St. Louis Circuit Attorney's Office on October 16, closed its case on the fire-bombing and refused arson warrants against Ms. McCann, the only suspect in the case.

Assistant Circuit Attorney Michael L. Sullivan said there is no doubt the fire was caused by arson but he noted that police had failed to provide evidence that would connect anyone to the incident.

The fire and explosion that destroyed the bar occurred in the early morning hours of September 11. There was evidence of arson, including two 5 gallon plastic gas containers that were found on the second floor of the building, where Ms. McCann had been living until several weeks before the fire. If she had not moved out, it is quite possible that she would have been killed in the blaze.

The tavern's licence was to have expired September 4 in the face of opposition in the neighborhood to its feminist and lesbian patronage. A majority of first floor tenants living near the bar signed a petition opposing license renewal, but a suit was filed on behalf of Bonita Stephens, the bar's owner, challenging the constitutionality of the petition, and the license was extended after a restraining order was secured in behalf of the owner.

"The Concerned Citizens Against Violence," an ad hoc group made up of patrons of the bar and sympathizers, blamed tension and hostility in the conservative neighborhood for the fire-bombing. According to police, there had been a series of phone threats made against continued operation of the bar.

Neighbors reported that a man with the name Ernie on his shirt said he saw three men leave the scene in a pickup. He thought it was strange that they didn't get out of the truck but left a moment after the blaze erupted. One neighbor reported, "I heard the explosion and I saw the man who did it leaving the scene."

So why has the arson case been closed leaving McCann as the only suspect in the case? In the public's mind is McCann still guilty, since she was only cleared due to "lack of evidence"? "I feel like I've been crucified by the press and TV, all of whom have named me as the primary suspect...the police and press have made me out the culprit," stated Ms. McCann.

Although the media had not reported it, Ms. McCann was never booked for arson. She was simply held on suspicion and then released. The press had further charged that McCann had "mysteriously" moved out of her apartment the day before the bombing. She had, in fact, moved out three weeks before, after a bomb threat which she had reported to the police.

Since the opening of the Mor or Les bar in March 1979, there have been repeated harassments of women with increasing incidences of violence. Verbal harassment of women finally mushroomed into threats of bodily harm, destruction of property, sniping at the bar during business hours, and repeated bomb threats, and finally the actual fire-bombing that turned the place to rubble.

For eleven years Mac McCann has fought many battles in the much needed war against injustices toward women. Is it for this reason that the media has "Crucified" her? McCann, however, will keep on fighting. Says McCann, "Through all our history women have been filled with guilt and fear, made to feel helpless in the face of constant injustices. I say no more. We must stand up and fight. I believe with all my heart that if we stand together we cannot be defeated."

letters home to mama

We Would Like To Hear From You

Dear Sisters,

Thank you for stating in your newspaper that the subscription is free to women in prison! I am a member of a defense committee for a lesbian serving 7 years at Bedford Hills Correctional Institute for defending herself from the attack of a violent man. Unfortunately for her the man died and the courts found her guilty of manslaughter.

I've read your paper many times and know that she will like it. At the present time we do not have a news release ready but as soon as it is done you will be among the first recipients.

Again--thank you for making your paper available to our sisters in prison.

In sisterhood,
Kt. Vermeulen
Sandy Hagen Defense Committee
Box 1200 164 W. 21st St.
NY, NY 10011

Ed. Note: We look forward to receiving your press release.

Dear Mama Rag,

I'm in the O.R.W. in Maryville, OH. Unfortunately this is my second time around but I'm happy to say I've had a chance to read a few of your publications in which I've found to be very news-worthy, enlightening and very interesting. Congratulations for doing such a good job. I'm definitely going to check it on the streets.

A woman in my cottage receives your publications but she'll be leaving soon. I'm unable to pay for your copies as yet so could you place me on your mailing list? I also have a good friend up here who is very interested in your publications and would also like to be placed on your mailing list. Your newspaper was just what she was looking for to tell the women her story. It would make a nice X-mas present for her for she is doing a lot of time. Thank you very much, and keep up the good work.

Sincerely,
Pamela Smith

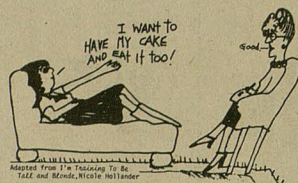
Ed. Note: You and your friend's names have been added to the subscription list. The April issue of Big Mama Rag is going to be featuring women in institutions. We would welcome articles about your struggles and problems with health, child custody, race and nationality issues, vocational programs, all concerns of women in prison.

Sisters;

We'd like to subscribe so we can keep current on events and it looks like you do the best job in this part of the country. Please let me know what I can do if anything, to help you cover news in the wimin's community.

Lynne Gillette
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Editor's note: We welcome submission of copy and ideas for themes and articles from our readers. We would like to hear from all of you!



Discussion Stirred About Therapy

Dear Women,

The last issue was most interesting--particularly the articles by Constance Perenyi on alcoholism and on therapy. The latter stirred much discussion here, and much agreement. We would state the case even more strongly. We believe therapy and feminism to be mutually exclusive in conception--focusing on the personal makes one politically useless. We agree with Mary Daly that crisis centers and crisis counseling is valuable--such as for rape, divorce, etc. Otherwise we need self help networks to help our changing, growing, evolving selves. As Constance pointed out so well, any therapy situation implies someone with answers. We need to know there are no answers to the shit men have made here. Our only weapons for survival are our anger and our feminism. No solutions, a lot of pain. We must make our own strength and stop looking for our hidden flaws in ourselves. We look forward to more of Perenyi's articles.

Bloodroot
a feminist restaurant and bookstore
Bridgeport, Ct.

Anti-Christmas Carol Correction

Dear BMR,

Just a reminder--Callie said she asked you all to print a correction about the anti-Christmas carols. "The First Hard Sell" and "Jingle Coins" were written by the Family Circus Theatre Collective of Portland, Oregon. The rest were by us.

Also, Callie says she has a subscription to BMR, but we haven't gotten the January issue yet...?

In love and struggle,
Becca
Olympia, Washington

Ed. note: We did not publish a January issue of BMR as was announced in our December issue. We spent the month of December restructuring our process, working on our politics, cleaning our office, and buying some new drafting tables.

The Trouble With Bars...Anywhere

Dear Chocolate,

I, and I'm sure many others have been seething since your article appeared in BMR. The space, the bold type and the emphasis on your name certainly suggested that BMR agreed with your uninformed, irresponsible, politically un-astute and totally lacking in sisterhood article.

I have run women's bars in St. Louis for almost 10 years; therefore, I must certainly know from whence I speak.

My first bone of contention is with your reference to logistics. Women's bars, owned by gay women, in my experience, (and I've been everywhere, including Denver) are always owned by women who can't afford to be in the bar business. I've heard 100's of women over my many years, women with money, talk about opening a bar. They never do it, they just talk about it. Only caring or financially naive women open women's bars! Bars don't grow on quiet cozy corners. To open a bar, isolated from the Pepsi Colas, the Joes Electric Shops of the world, would cost a fortune. After you hear my story I wonder if you will believe that were someone to have the money would the cost be justified? To be able to afford opening a bar that has not already had the plumbing, the electricity, etc. set up in some way could be a financial disaster. And then there are licensing laws that certainly effect how and where you can open a bar. Let me speak to



the realities.

My first endeavor was above a faggot owned bar. I went there first because it was financially expedient. The "Top of the Bull" a cozy attractive bar in East St. Louis might still be open had I been willing to frequently kiss a faggot's ass. I wasn't--it isn't. I was then offered a place by the straight male owner of a gay club. The "Bottom of the Pot" was in the "rathskellar" or basement of the Potpourri. Politically this place seemed expedient. It was in an area considered the "gay amerika" of St. Louis. Parking was impossible, and the male customers of the Potpourri upstairs hated it that women had taken part of what they considered their's. The fights were constant between myself and the fellows who ran the upstairs. Women didn't know about this. This place was popular, but certainly not without many problems. At last, I was able to graduate to a place I felt would be all ours. For women only! There were no faggots close, in fact no bars or businesses close. No pepsi-colas or joes. But it was in a predominantly Black neighborhood. Many women would not come in at all because this was true, and many of these women were Black. To be able to survive the financial risk of this place I had to live in the basement, and I mean a basement basement, of this place for 5 months. A fact which aided in ending the only long term relationship I sustained in all the years I was in the bar business. Living in this basement also caused the initial infection that eventually killed what was most precious to me, my dog. I say most precious because I certainly suffered more at her passing than from the passing of anyone else. I was on a financial shoestring but I cared--cared that there be someplace for women to get

MORE ON PAGE 18

More Letters Page 17

Trouble With Bars

together. I realized early in the game that I was not in this business to make money. This was my political statement! Yet, here in this isolated spot, women's cars were frequently vandalized and/or burglarized. Two women were beaten up. Our windows were broken, we were robbed twice. I personally prevented a woman being beaten and a 16 year old girl from being raped and god knows what more. Many nights I risked a gun or a knife in my gut by threatened angry men who couldn't get in. I was also arrested and spent a couple of hours in jail for working to a locked door. Two and one half years later, only after 2 women had been robbed at gunpoint the "Middle of the Road" closed. I could no longer bear the anxiety I felt for the safety of the women I loved, my customers. When I closed I had \$200 to my name. But I had something much more precious much more valuable. I had the knowledge that I had for many years provided a place for women to get together. May I say without humility- that if women who met their present close friends and lovers in a place I ran, decided to give a party for me, they would have to hire the largest hall in St. Louis if they all attended.

I deserve a party, by the way. Well, at least I deserve more than I got at the last place I opened. Because I always felt "we deserved something better", and because my credit was good I moved uptown! Parking was excellent. The place was large and furnished beautifully. The neighborhood was supposedly excellent. We deserved this place! Opening night was a tremendous success. Over 200 women had been reached by the terrific St. Louis grapevine. Within one month of opening women were coming from everywhere, including many many closets. It was the place to go. But also within one month a barrage of miseries had befallen us. Our \$1100 windows were broken. (We couldn't afford the exorbitant cost of window insurance.) The broken windows were also shot at. We had a very frightening bomb scare. (The police response was laughable, they later in the newspapers denied we ever had a bomb threat, even though it is on tape at police headquarters.) Men flashed at both our front and back doors. Four men frequently harassed women on the streets and in their cars--when I went to the police to complain about their poor surveillance and through much perseverance on my part we discovered that 3 of the 4 men were in the police academy about to graduate and become St. Louis' finest. We were hassled at our front door nightly by men. We had various ways of getting rid of them. And then the neighborhood circulated a petition to have us closed. The laws of St. Louis allow anyone the right to circulate a petition and if they gain 51% of the neighborhood signatures a bar is closed. They do not have to give a reason for the petition. Justice--hah! They got their 51% through intimidation, lies, and coercion, and we lost our license. Because our \$1.00 cover charge at the

From page 2

door had allowed me to put some money away I was able to afford an attorney. We fought and won a restraining order. This order forced the liquor commissioner to issue us a new license. We were never closed. Our next court date would have been October 11, and I am confident we would have won here too. But on September 11 "Mor or Les" was firebombed. Who--who did this? Not the faggots who were unhappy when we invaded their domain, not the Blacks who were unhappy when we invaded their domain. Oh yes, it was the wonderful white middle class, hypocritical, bigotted amerika who burned "Mor or Les" down, and positively the culprits were not women.

I was blamed and arrested. I was jailed for 7 hours before they could decide they had no evidence to keep me jailed, and the backlash of angry caring women must have scared the hell out of the powers that be in St. Louis. The media persecuted me for 5 days. The burned out bar and the suggestion that I was the culprit was front page sensationalism. They tried and convicted me in the media. What pained me more than this adversity was the fact that many in the gay community believed the media. I believe that most of the faggots wanted to believe I did it, and I guess the women that believed (and there were many) are among the many ostriches in this country that believe anything the lying media has to say. I feel very deeply saddened by this. Not because they thought me guilty, but because they are so politically naive they are not aware of the shit that is coming down all over this country. I pray that they wake up before it is too late. Those miserable closets get mighty stuffy. After I was released from jail I was threatened anonymously a number of times. I was threatened that if I didn't shut up I would be jailed again and not come out of jail alive. And I have to say honestly that for the first time in my life I was frightened. I hope you realize that I was in a state of shock. I could not function. I could not cry. I ached. I had lost my best friend and I had been accused of killing her. I was asked to move from my house--I felt I had no place to go. People stared at me on the streets and they whispered, at least I thought all of this happened. I'm sure it did, but somehow I feel not too sure of anything. As time went on I felt more and more isolated--deserted. Where were my friends the day 2 months later that the media said the case was closed and I had theoretically been exonerated? I did not receive one phone call in the 48 hours after the media reported this exhumation. I am broke--lawyers took care of that--and I feel very much alone, and still very scared when I realize the power the media whields.

You ask "what's the trouble with women's bars?" Chocolate, since you decided to complain, and now possibly have "the other side of the story" maybe you can answer this question!

Most sincerely,
Mac McCann

Dessie Woods

From page 6

it was a whole line of people, all either European or North American, all white people, and they went through the line fluently until they got to me and "Who are you?" And they held me there for at least 15 minutes, then they went and got one of the immigration officials to take me into a sound-proof room and sit me on one side of a table and she sat on the other side of the table and continued to harass me and some of the questions, "Who is the African People's Socialist Party?" I told her "It's the African People's Socialist Party." "What does this African organization do?" "Organize."It was questions like this that they continued to ask me, continued to harass me around, until I had to tell them, "Look, I can't answer no more questions. The only thing you can do is let me through or whatever you're going to do, but you need to make a decision."

So they decided, because they did not want to expose their own self and they realized the hell the U.S. was catching around the Dessie Woods case and the human rights campaign, they did not want to expose their selves, so it was necessary for them to make a tactical decision to allow me in, but not without being watched and not without being harassed. And the African People's Socialist Party has been under serious harassment ever since. So the tour had great significance, and I cannot over state and I cannot explain at this particular time the depth of that significance.

But I'll tell you one thing, when Dessie Woods is free, we'll all see the significance, because there is no question in my mind, and there should be no question in anyone's mind who actually supports Dessie Woods, that Dessie Woods will be free, because the power of the people has shown clearly, historically, that the people do have the power to free Dessie Woods, and I believe we have that power and that's why I work around the case of Dessie Woods because I know we can free her.

Would you tell us about the African National Prison Organization?

The National Committee to Defend Dessie Woods was organized under the leadership of the African People's Socialist Party. Not only are we involved in the struggle to free Dessie Woods, we're also involved in building the African National Prison Organization (ANPO), because we know that one out of every four black men will go to prison in his lifetime, that a government statistic, that's a known fact, that one out of every four black men, whether they commit a crime or not, will go to prison in their lifetime. That 80% of the women in prison are black women, that 58% of the people on death row are black people. And we understand that that's why we see a concrete need to build ANPO.

But not only to build ANPO, but to support the just struggles of all oppressed peoples, nationally and internationally. So on Sunday (Nov. 25th) the African People's Socialist Party (APSP) made a call for a demonstration that was going to be held in Gainesville, Florida in support of the just Iranian struggles and the demands that they were raising.

We assembled in the African community, where we chanted down the street, "If you want to set the hostages free, Send the Shah to Khomeini.", etc.

The entire police department, I believe, or 99% of the police department marched with that rally, as we rallied through the black community. Once we got downtown, we were no longer in the black community, and when we turned the corner, it was a mob of white people, there ready and waiting to attack us. We continued the demonstration because we were supposed to have speakers and we were going to proceed and try to get the speaking done, but we were confronted. These people were supposed to be anti-Iranian and pro-American, but they wasn't talking about no Iranians, they was talking about, "Niggers, niggers, niggers."

....And that was one time we realized that first hand, nothing about the Shah, nothing about Iran was raised. It was "Nigger" "Go home, Niggers" and all kinds of slogans like that that they were raising.

....This is what we were confronted with. We had women and children and this mob attacked us and we were outnumbered like 20 to 1 and in the confrontation - a very militant and physical confrontation with this white mob, the police disappeared. The police disappeared until they saw us striking back....this is when the police reappeared and took one of the brothers that was in the demonstration and beat him and put him in a police car and arrested him....the mob took the red, black and green flag and tore it to shreds. And so we clearly understand that the just demands of the Iranian people....we have unity and solidarity - we're united with that struggle. Because we understand that the Shah is guilty of killing thousands and thousands of Iranian people, just like the U.S. government is guilty of killing thousands and thousands of African people in this country. As revolutionaries, we have a responsibility to be out there.

....And progressive people, especially white people, you got to understand clearly whose side you on, because U.S. imperialism is dying, the U.S. is getting into ass kicking, and you can be on the side of the ass kicking or you can unite with the just liberation struggles of the African people and other oppressed peoples because African people gonna win, that's a known fact. I know we're going to win.

Phone or telegram President Carter and Georgia Governor Busbee and demand the immediate release of Dessie Woods. These calls are being coordinated internationally so that Carter and Busbee will constantly be out on