



Marsha P. Johnson

(1944–1992)

Marsha P. Johnson was an American gay liberation activist and self-identified drag queen. She was one of the prominent figures in the Stonewall uprising of 1969. A founding member of the Gay Liberation Front, Johnson co-founded S.T.A.R. (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries), alongside Sylvia Rivera. Johnson was known as the "mayor of Christopher Street".

Born Malcolm Michaels Jr. in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Johnson attended an African Methodist Episcopal Church and was a devout Christian throughout her life. Johnson first began wearing dresses at the age of five but stopped temporarily because she would get harassed by boys near her house. She described being the victim of sexual assault as an adolescent. Johnson's mother told her that being homosexual is like being "lower than a dog".

Johnson waited on tables after moving to Greenwich Village in 1966. She called herself "Black Marsha" but later decided on "Marsha P. Johnson, getting Johnson from the restaurant Howard Johnson's on 42nd Street. She said the P stood for "pay it no mind". Johnson identified herself as gay, as transvestite, and a queen (referring to drag queen). Susan Stryker, a professor of human gender and sexuality studies at the University of Arizona, Johnson's gender expression may be called gender non-conforming in absence of transgender, which was not used broadly during her lifetime

Johnson was one of the first drag queens to go to the Stonewall Inn, after they began allowing women and drag queens inside. In the early hours of June 28, 1969, the Stonewall uprising occurred. While the first two nights of rioting were the most intense, spontaneous demonstrations and marches occurred for roughly a week. On the second night, Johnson climbed a lamppost and dropped a bag with a brick in it down on a cop car. Johnson joined the GLF and participated in the first Pride on the first anniversary of the rebellion.

Though regarded as "generous and warm-hearted" under her Marsha persona, Johnson's dark side sometimes emerged under Johnson's "male persona as Malcolm", resulting in Johnson being hospitalized and sedated. When the violent side emerged, Johnson could be aggressive and speak in a deeper voice and "become a very nasty, vicious man, looking for fights".

In 1975, Johnson was photographed by Andy Warhol. In 1990, now an AIDS activist, Johnson appeared singing the song "Love" while wearing a "Silence = Death" badge.

Shortly after the 1992 pride parade, Johnson's body was discovered in the Hudson River. Police ruled the death a suicide, but friends and the local community insisted Johnson was not suicidal and noted that the back of Johnson's head had a massive wound. Several people saw a neighbourhood resident fighting with Johnson on July 4, 1992. During the fight he used a homophobic slur, and later bragged at a bar that he had killed a drag queen named Marsha.

The 2017 documentary, *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson*, follows trans woman Victoria Cruz as she investigated Johnson's murder. American drag queen TV personality RuPaul called Johnson an inspiration, "the true Drag Mother." During an episode of his show, RuPaul told her contestants that Johnson "paved the way for all of [them]". In 2018 the New York Times published a belated obituary for her.

Source - Wikipedia

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