

RAY MICHAEL JOHN HARVEY-AMER

14th JUNE 1935 – 22nd MAY 2020

Ray Harvey-Amer, a long time resident of Croydon who worked tirelessly for the LGBT community in the borough died at the end of May. An early gay activist he was part of the small but courageous band in the 1970s and 80s who publicised how unfairly LGBT people were being treated.

Following the Stonewall riots in America, Ray and his fellow campaigners, instead of using violent protests, adopted outrageous stunts to publicise their demands for sexual equality. Ray channelled his activities through various groups including Gay Liberation Front and Outrage: letting off condoms in Westminster Cathedral, invading the VIP enclosure at Ascot in drag and disrupting Mary Whitehouse's infamous Festival of Light rally in the Central Hall Westminster dressed in a nun's habit.

He was born in Battersea into a close knit working class family and was the youngest of seven surviving children. On leaving school he entered the Royal Navy and trained first as a nurse and then as a health visitor. Post graduate studies followed, leading to his being appointed an Area Health Education Officer in inner London.

Whilst in the Navy Ray met Mike, the love of his life, and they spent the next thirty years together, until Mike's untimely death in 1990 during the AIDS epidemic.

Having lived through Mike's illness, he realised, with the foresight with which he was blessed, that those within the gay community who were diagnosed HIV positive and their partners and carers would need support and guidance and with his specialised knowledge of the NHS he was able to find premises and funding and with his charm to conjure up an army of volunteers to set up the Aids Care Education Project which was a lifeline for many years for all those in Croydon and surrounding area affected by AIDS.

With similar foresight, in the new millennium, he noted that older LGBT people might be more hesitant about going out in the evenings and suggested there should be some daytime activities as well. This resulted in Ray founding the Rainbow Reading Group, supported by Croydon Area Gay Society, in conjunction with Croydon Central Library which meets monthly in the central library.

This led on, totally unexpectedly, to Ray's final major project.

LGBT asylum seekers, having to attend at the Home Office immigration centre in Croydon discovered an LGBT friendly group was meeting in the central library. They could not discuss the books the reading group had selected but they had their own harrowing stories to tell of being persecuted and hounded from their homes because of their sexuality. It prompted Ray to set up Rainbows Across Borders as a self-help group for LGBT asylum seekers and yet again he found premises, this time at CVA, and funds and in the Rainbows Singers Across Borders a vehicle to publicise the group's cause and to help its membership bond together. He was also unstinting in the personal assistance he gave individuals in preparing their cases, providing supporting statements and appearing at immigration tribunals.

Ray also took part in various activities involving the wider LGBT scene in Croydon. He was involved each year in LGBT History Month and the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia and as part of the steering group co-ordinating local LGBT groups' activities he helped plan the initial Croydon Pridefest, now a permanent feature of the Croydon calendar (rogue viruses permitting).

In addition he was deeply concerned that the LGBT community should be able to write its own history and took active steps to make sure that as much relevant paperwork and memorabilia was lodged in appropriate archives including the museum at Croydon Clocktower for future researchers to use.

He will be sorely missed.