



# Returning to Stonewall

The trailblazers behind the new Stonewall National Monument Visitor Center reflect on the riot that started a revolution **BY ELLA GAUCI**

Mark Segal had only been living in New York for six weeks when the raid happened. At 18, he had moved from Philadelphia in the hopes of discovering a queer community. Quickly he found himself directed to Christopher Street, where illegal bars offered havens for LGBTQIA people to meet, dance, kiss and chat. Police raids were part of everyday life, but usually were squashed with some cash from the Mafia. This raid, however, was different.

As the lights flickered on and chairs, bottles and people were thrown around the room, Mark was frozen in fear. “My first reaction was ‘Someone should call the police.’ But what do you do when it’s the police doing this?” he explains as we start our call.

In terror, Mark fled the bar with others who congregated across the street from its door. Once the police had done what they believed to be sufficient damage, they began to head towards the exit. It was then that anger filled Mark. The anger of 18 years of discrimination, persecution and homophobia. Grabbing anything he could find in his pockets, he joined others in hurling objects at the door to stop the police from exiting. In

the midst of the ensuing chaos, the prominent activist Marty Robinson handed Mark a piece of chalk.

“He told me to write on all the streets and on the walls: ‘Tomorrow night, Stonewall.’ At some point on that night, I decided that this was what I was going to do with the rest of my life.”

The Stonewall uprising of 1969 is one of the most recognisable moments in LGBTQIA civil rights history. On that first evening, around

**“Stonewall was the march that changed the world”**

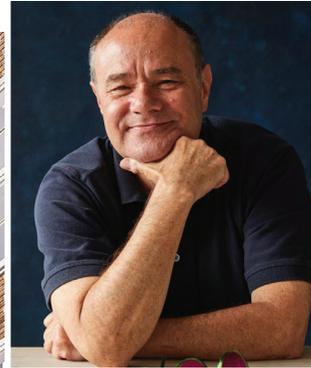
200 people gathered outside the bar to protest against the civil injustice and police brutality that was directed towards the LGBTQIA community. The five days of protesting that ensued after the police raid on Greenwich Village’s beloved gay bar The Stonewall Inn changed the course of LGBTQIA history forever. Within one year, the first Pride marches in history were organised. “Stonewall was the march that changed the world,” Mark explains.

So what happened to the venue that housed such a pivotal moment in history? The building has been both a bar and nail salon. However, when Diana Rodriguez, founder of the non-profit organisation Pride Live, saw the building listed for sale she knew she needed to do something.

And thus, the Stonewall National Monument Visitor Center was born. After raising millions in funding, this new centre will mark the first LGBTQIA site to be recognised within the National Parks System. Following years of extensive research, the centre will shed light on the monumental impact of the Stonewall uprising, highlighting the people like Mark who were there that evening.

“I’m a huge fan of Queen Elizabeth, and one of the greatest things she ever said was ‘You have to be seen.’ And we have to be seen,” Diana tells me. “That makes a difference. By putting the stake back in the ground at that address [51 Christopher Street], it makes all of it very real. It

Photos: EDG Architecture & Engineering, Michael Rubottom, Jason Varney



Right: Mark Segal and Daisy Reeves

makes us very real. I think that can be a second catalyst. Once you have your home back... it matters."

For the last six years, this new centre has gathered together a team which spans continents. Daisy Reeves, global inclusion and diversity client relationship partner at BCLP law firm, is part of the pro bono legal team which has helped to bring this centre to life. Working alongside James Colgate, who has led the New York team on the ground, Daisy believes that this new centre is a powerful reminder that we must keep fighting against injustice.

"When I saw the inn for the first time, I cannot tell you how much of a thud of history I felt as an LGBTQIA individual," Daisy explains. "To have the visitor centre there, where allies and the LGBTQIA community can go and feel that tangible thud of history, is vital for us to immerse ourselves in, to celebrate how far we've come, and commemorate what those people did for us."

In the wake of terrifying new policies like Florida's Don't Say Gay bill, remembering the fight of our LG-BTQIA predecessors has never been so pressing. Diana's central focus is to carry the torch of the generations before us into the present day.

"At the moment, we're going backwards. There is still this move towards repressing history. We have to continue to fight back," she tells me. "You have to actively fight for what you believe in. We're really afraid of what's happening. In a way, we're counting on the next generations, and if our space can carry on the fight, we've done our job." **D**

See [stonewallvisitorcenter.org](https://www.stonewallvisitorcenter.org)