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## Angels-on-a-Pinhead: History of the Order of Perpetual Indulgence

By Sr. Soami



Sr. Mary Timothy Simplicity, SPI

On Holy Saturday, 1979 I donned a nun's habit for the first time. With two other 'gay male nuns' I sashayed out among the faithfully queer on the Castro and then trekked to the nude beach at Land's End to frolic with the pagan babies there assembled. At each location we were embraced and honored. "Good Afternoon, Sisters." "Happy Easter, Sisters." "Bless me for I have sinned, Sister." It was an afternoon of revelation and retribution.

Years before I had studied to be a priest with the Capuchin Franciscan friars until I was rejected when I confessed my repressed gay feelings. Then fifteen years later in the city of St. Francis in one playful afternoon of transgender dress-up, I reclaimed my earlier calling to the religious life.

In the next several months I, along with the other three 'founding mothers' of SPI (Sr. Vicious Power Hungry Bitch, Reverend Mother Abbess—now deceased, and Sr. Hysterectoria, aka, Agnes deGarron), recruited ten others—mostly Radical Faeries—to form an order of gay male nuns with a mission to promulgate joy and expiate guilt. By January 1980 we named ourselves The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. In the intervening three decades we have become more inclusive with les/bi women, transpersons and even a heterosexual male, Sr. HedraSexual, taking the veil.

Our first official public appearance was a march and rally in SF against nuclear power on the first anniversary of Three Mile Island. Reverend Mother attended the planning sessions. Some organizers told us not to come. We were politically incorrect. We were drag queens. We were not germane to the issues at hand. (As if anyone on the planet could not be!)

Sr. Succuba had calligraphed our gothic SPI banner. Neighborhood Arts had sewn our first fourteen habits. At the convent we'd been making black and white pom poms for days. The rally in Golden Gate Park would be just two blocks from the two convents that housed ten of us. So we gracefully showed up at the Civic Center, jumping in between the giant Mutant Sponges from the Farallon Islands and Haight hippies pushing a coffin marked Capitalism. En route we alternated cheerful pom pom routines with a Rosary in Time of Nuclear Peril. It was a meditation on Five Sorrowful Nuclear Realities: the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima, the U.S. Bombing of Nagasaki, Karen Silkwood Killed in Oklahoma, The Chernobyl Disaster in Russia (added later), Three Mile Island in Harrisburg. The Ave Prayer in between implored the Great Mother to protect us from the earth defilers. On that first outing we established the range of our ministry, from silly satire to thoughtful spirituality.

The rest has been a colorful history quite often played out in the media both locally and internationally. We are sacred clowns in queer culture. We employ the sanctifying grace of camp humor as a survival strategy and for social and spiritual transformation. We support playing and praying in public. Our first charity work was with MCC to benefit Cuban refugees. It was a church hall bingo followed by a salsa dance party directed by Sr. UnityHarmony. Two days later we protested at USF at their 125th anniversary party that tried to deny the existence of the lesbian and gay campus groups at this Jesuit school. Two years later in 1982 we produced the first safe sex pamphlet, Play Fair. Srs. Mary Media, Roz Erection and Florence Nightmare, R.N., AKA, Bobbi Campbell the 1st AIDS poster boy, gently guided that

accomplishment. And that year Sr. Boom Boom, running as 'nun of the above,' garnered 22,000 votes—almost becoming a SF Board of Supervisor.



Sisters joining lesbian and gay student groups at the University of San Francisco protesting this Jesuit school's attempts to deny their existence on the occasion of its 125th. anniversary, October 1980. (Rink Foto from Soami Archive)

For the first ten years I was known as Sr. Missionary Position. At our 10th anniversary party I altered my sisterly habits to become Sr. Missionary P. DeLight. In 2002 to honor the passing of a beloved faerie brother I became Sr. Iamosama DeLite, the Sodomite of the Most Holy and Beautiful Dove, Rumi Sufi Heart Now or for short Sr. So Am I.

In 1981 Mother Inferior Across the Abyss established the Order of Perpetual Indulgence in Australia. The Sisters there colonized New Zealand, Thailand and England. Toronto, Seattle, LA and Germany spontaneously combusted with our blessings or was it parthenogenesis? No, they definitely were not virgin births! Sr. X (RIP) of SF was the godmother of the Parisian Sisters. I believe England begat Scotland and we are not sure who infiltrated Uruguay and Colombia. In the past few years, Srs. Edith My Flesh and Helen Wheels at the Mother House have assisted in the formation of new houses in Portland, San Diego, Palm Springs and Las Vegas. Srs. Merry Peter and

Mary Timothy continue on with guiding SPI missions in Eureka, Arizona, Tampa, St. Louis and Sr. Ivanna Mann is organizing Chicago.



Srs. Merry Peter and Bella daBall, SPI

The Missionary Order of PI under the Reverend Mother Generalship of Sr. Clara CumPassionata operates from Des Moines and Kansas City thru Tennessee and on to Rhode Island. Founding Mother Banana Nut Bread (also Agnes) guides the NYC (dis)Order of Sisters. More than a hundred of our 500 sisters worldwide attended our June 2006 Conclave in Los Angeles to celebrate the Order's 10th anniversary there. Srs. Sparkle Plenty, NovaNilla and the rest of the Russian River Order are hosting the World SPI/OPI Conclave this September.

We combine social activism with glamour drag for public edification and personal enlightenment. We produce public parties. We lampoon political and clerical party

lines. We celebrate queer diversity and community. We visit the sick. We shelter the homeless. We scatter the ashes of our dead.

Updated: Cinco deMayo 2008, June 17, 2008  
3 Sisters Retreat House, Short Mountain Sanctuary, Liberty, TN

