

A Somewhat Brief Sistory

A more complete sistory (of San Francisco) can be found at <http://thesisters.org/index.php/sistory>

Pre-Sistory

Late 1960's through 1970's

San Francisco slowly becomes well known for it's gay community, as well as having strange counter-culture icons roaming the streets. One of these was a commune/theater troupe of gay, radical hippies called "The Cockettes". They quickly become famous for performing strange, psychedelic theater pieces involving elaborate face-paint, glitter, parody, and somewhat spiritual/political themes. Later, their founder, Hibiscus, left the group and founded "The Angels of Light" to do more spiritually oriented "free" theater, without a charge. The Castro district of San Francisco slowly becomes a mecca for gay men, and begin a culture shift that eventually leads to the election of the nation's first openly gay official - City Supervisor Harvey Milk.

Meanwhile...

1974 to 1976

Fred Brungard and Kenneth Bunch start Midwest Gay Pride Conferences at the University of Iowa. At the same time, Bunch starts a traveling drag performance troupe called "The Sugar Plum Fairies". Members include Tracy Bjorgum, Susan Short (a biological female), "Lisa" (a cross-dresser), and Michael Salinas (who later became editor of The Bay Area Reporter in San Francisco). Short asks an order of Catholic nuns in Cedar Rapids, Iowa to borrow the habits of a few deceased nuns, under the (false) story of needing them for a production of "The Sound of Music." The habits are instead worn for their drag performances throughout Iowa, doing classic diva tributes and pompon routines. Bunch lives on a gay farm on the outskirts of Iowa City briefly, where he experiments with white face makeup in photography, as well as psychedelics.

1977

Bunch moves from Iowa to San Francisco. He disposes of all of his past drag costumes, except for the nun habits.

1978

Brungard moves to San Francisco into an apartment with Bunch.

Also meanwhile...

June 25, 1978

The first rainbow flag, designed by Gilbert Baker, is flown in San Francisco's Gay Freedom Day Parade. Years later, Baker would join (and leave) The Sisters in the 1980's as "Sister Chanel 2001". But that's another story...

The Beginning of Official Sistory

Saturday, April 14, 1979

On Holy Saturday (the Saturday before Easter), in a fit of "boredom", Bunch & Brungard and friend Bruce (Barouk) Golden put on the old habits, and walk around the Castro district and over to Lands End. Bunch wore his whiteface for artistic purposes, as well as to hide his appearance from gentlemen "clients". The public reactions are so strong that they decide to make it a regular occurrence.

1979

The nun-drag concept continues, going as nun-style cheerleaders at gay softball league tournaments (running their veils up a flagpole). The idea spread to their friends Bill Graham (a transcendental meditation teacher) and Edmund Garron. The four become roommates and take on the names Sister Ardhanarishvara (Bunch)¹, Sister Missionary Position (Brungard)², Reverend Mother Abyss (Graham), and Sister Hysterectoria (Garron)³ and begin calling themselves Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

Fall 1979

Sister Hysterectoria and Reverend Mother attend the first International Radical Faery gathering, and find more like-minded men with the calling.

Spring 1980

The Sisters participate in a city-wide march marking the one-year anniversary of the Three Mile Island nuclear accident. Despite being asked not to go by organizers, the Sisters participate anyway, and alternate pom pom routines with praying a "Rosary In A Time of Nuclear Peril", asking for protection against "the earth defilers."

October 1980

The Sisters work with the local MCC church to produce a charity bingo/disco benefit for its Cuban refugee program. It's a wild success, and raises over \$1,500 in one evening.

Fall 1982

Sister Boom Boom runs for City Supervisor, running against Dianne Feinstein. Sister Boom Boom's posters feature herself riding a broom, a la the Wicked Witch in "The Wizard of Oz", spelling out "Surrender Dianne" in the sky with smoke. She garners a very large amount of votes, and is credited with being the reason for current San Francisco laws stating candidates must run with their legal name.

1982

Registered nurses, Sister Florence Nightmare and Sister Roz Erektion joined with a team of Sisters and medical professionals to create Play Fair!, the first safer sex pamphlet to use plain sex-positive language, practical advice, and humor.

1 a.k.a. "Grand Mother Vicious Power Hungry Bitch" (or just "Vish" for short)

2 a.k.a. "Mish" for short. Renamed in 1989 "Sr. Missionary P. DeLight". Renamed in 2002 "Sr. Iamosama DeLite, the Sodomite of the Most Holy and Beautiful Dove, Rumi Sufi Heart Now", or simply "Sister Soami" (pronounced "So Am I") for short.

3 a.k.a. Drag performer "Agnes de Garron"

August 8, 1983

Sister Florence Nightmare appears out-of-face (as Bobbi Campbell), with her partner on the cover of Newsweek magazine with the headline "Gay America: Sex, Politics, and the Impact of AIDS". Sister Florence is credited as being one of the first people openly living with AIDS, even when it was only thought of as simply "gay cancer" (Kaposi Sarcoma), and starting the People With AIDS (PWA) movement, innovating the treatment, care, and stigma associated with the disease.

1987

Pope John Paul II visits San Francisco. The Sisters arrive at the airport to greet him, and in response to his anti-gay/anti-AIDS prevention stances, perform an exorcism in effigy. Rumor has it that this act got The Sisters on the Papal List of Heretics. Some have doubts that such a list exists, but it makes for good press.

1996

The Sisters create four large panels for the Names Project (AIDS Memorial Quilt), with solar rays naming all of the Sisters who had passed away from the pandemic. Their quilt pieces are prominently displayed in Washington DC that year, the last time the entire quilt could be shown in one place.

2006

The United Nuns Privy Council (UNPC) is formed to provide a democratic structure through which aspiring chapters of the Sisters may become officially "Fully Professed".

November 2009

Three complete strangers interested in forming a new chapter of The Sisters in Orlando, Florida are introduced to each other by the UNPC. One is a missionary sister moving to Orlando from The Abbey of St. Joan in Seattle, Washington (Sister Isabella Ringing). One has a calling and previous experience working with the Tampa Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (Sister Majyna Burns). The third, a native, has heard of The Sisters existing elsewhere for many years, and desperately wants Orlando to have a chapter of its own (Sister Ambrosia Discordia). They immediately find themselves a handful of founding Sisters, and they begin ministering to their community.

January 18, 2010 (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)

The Orlando Sisters are granted Official Missionary status by the UNPC. They choose San Francisco to be their mentor house, and begin the year's minimum process of planning many community service events, drafting bylaws, policies, procedures, and becoming a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

January 17, 2011 (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)

The Orlando Sisters are voted on by the UNPC, and become a Fully Professed House of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

March 17-20, 2011

The Orlando Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence celebrate their Exequatur. Joy and frivolity are had by all.