

Requiem For A Drag Queen



MAY 2, 1979 UPFRONT

She died alone in a solitary jail cell with no lights. The \$28 drunk charge had been upped to \$203.50 because Tina had been in the Baytown jail once before for the same reason. Judges have that discretion and can use it as they need in order to fit their idea of social values. Tina was a transperson. Baytown does not have the ordinance that Houston does to arrest cross dressers. And yet Tina sat alone in that dark cell. She could not make that discretionary fine.

Tina Marie Gentry was 29 years old. Surely, she had thought back to her youth as Tim Woods, child actor, veteran of *Bonanza* and *Wagon Train* and countless beach-blanket movies, too. But Tim could not be two people. So Tina began to live. Tim's kin didn't want Tina — didn't like Tina. Still Tina lived.

Tina had friends. She had Connie; she had Sally and she had others. Tina was a free spirit and lived among other free spirits... in Baytown.

She remembered the last time she couldn't make her fine. Off to the Harris County Rehabilitation Center. In Rehab she was met with the disgust of ignorance, foul names, and people who cut off her hair. She had been kicked by her fellow inmates, ridiculed by the *peace-officers*, spat upon and humiliated. Oh yes, cigarette burns, too.

Baytown jailers found her dead. She'd hung herself in that dark, lonely cell at 3 PM Thursday, April 19, 1979. That's the official story anyway.

At the funeral, Raymond told me that he'd seen 23 cheap coffins and prayed it would end someday. This was my first. I gazed at the figure of Jesus and the body of Tina. They had both been rejected and pitifully treated. Rev. Chuck of MCCR offered us hope that we will keep seeking to help and to aid our sisters and brothers.

I have much hope and I know that my people will be free, but i get frustrated. I feel like a Negro slave in 1859 who knows the time is ripe — but when?

Her blood-kin (I can't call them family) didn't even want her body. That was good, because her family — we who loved her — did. If her kin had taken her body, they would have buried what they could not have — Tim. But it was Tina who was rejected, hounded and persecuted by our society. It was Tina who died. It is Tina we miss.

Tina is free.

Phyllis