HERE ARE THE INSPIRING PHOTOS OF THE 1971 CHRISTOPHER STREET LIBERATION DAY MARCH IN NEW YORK. THEY ARE REPRESENTATIVE OF SIMILAR DEMONSTRATIONS HELD ELSEWHERE ON JUNE 27TH. CRAIG RODWELL, AN ACKNOWLEDGED LEADER IN GAY LIB AND AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE FOR THE MARCH, TELLS US HOW TO PLAN SUCH DEMONSTRATIONS IN SMALLER CITIES EVERYWHERE IN . . .

GAY AND FREE

BY CRAIG RODWELL

ON Sunday, June 27th, 1971, tens of thousands of Gay people throughout the world participated in the second annual observance of Christopher Street Liberation Day. Mass marches and parades through downtown areas were held in such cities as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, London, Paris, and Stockholm; and there were dozens of smaller observances, mostly "Gay-Ins" at parks and other public places in other cities.

The purpose of Christopher Street Liberation Day (celebrated yearly on the last Sunday in June) is to commemorate and reaffirm the new spirit of pride and determination among Gay people which emerged after the now historic "Christopher Street/Stonewall Riots" of June 1969 in New York City. At that time, about 2,000 Gay people rioted in the streets of Greenwich Village to protest the police raid on a Gay bar, the Stonewall Inn. It marked the first time historically that Gay people didn't run-and-hide, but stayed-and-fought-back. Before June 1969 there had been a few hundred of us struggling along in the "Homophile Movement," but after the riots, thousands of Gay people here and abroad were inspired to stand up, and since that time what was the Homophile Movement has evolved into the beginnings of a mass movement termed "Gay Liberation."

In the 1971 New York City observance, highlighted by a march from Christopher Street in Greenwich Village to Central Park three miles away, approximately 20,000 people participated in the 2½-hour walk on a sunny, warm afternoon. The 1971 turnout was about twice that of the 1970 march; and that number is expected to double in 1972.

The general organizing group for the New York march is the Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee of New York. The Committee is composed of individuals from the Gay community and representatives from the dozen or so Gay organizations in the city. I must emphasize here that the CSLDC is not an organization like the Gay Activists Alliance, Daughters of Bilitis, Mattachine Society or the Gay Liberation Front; it is a work-group which comes together every year for the sole purpose of organizing and promoting the Christopher Street Liberation Day march.

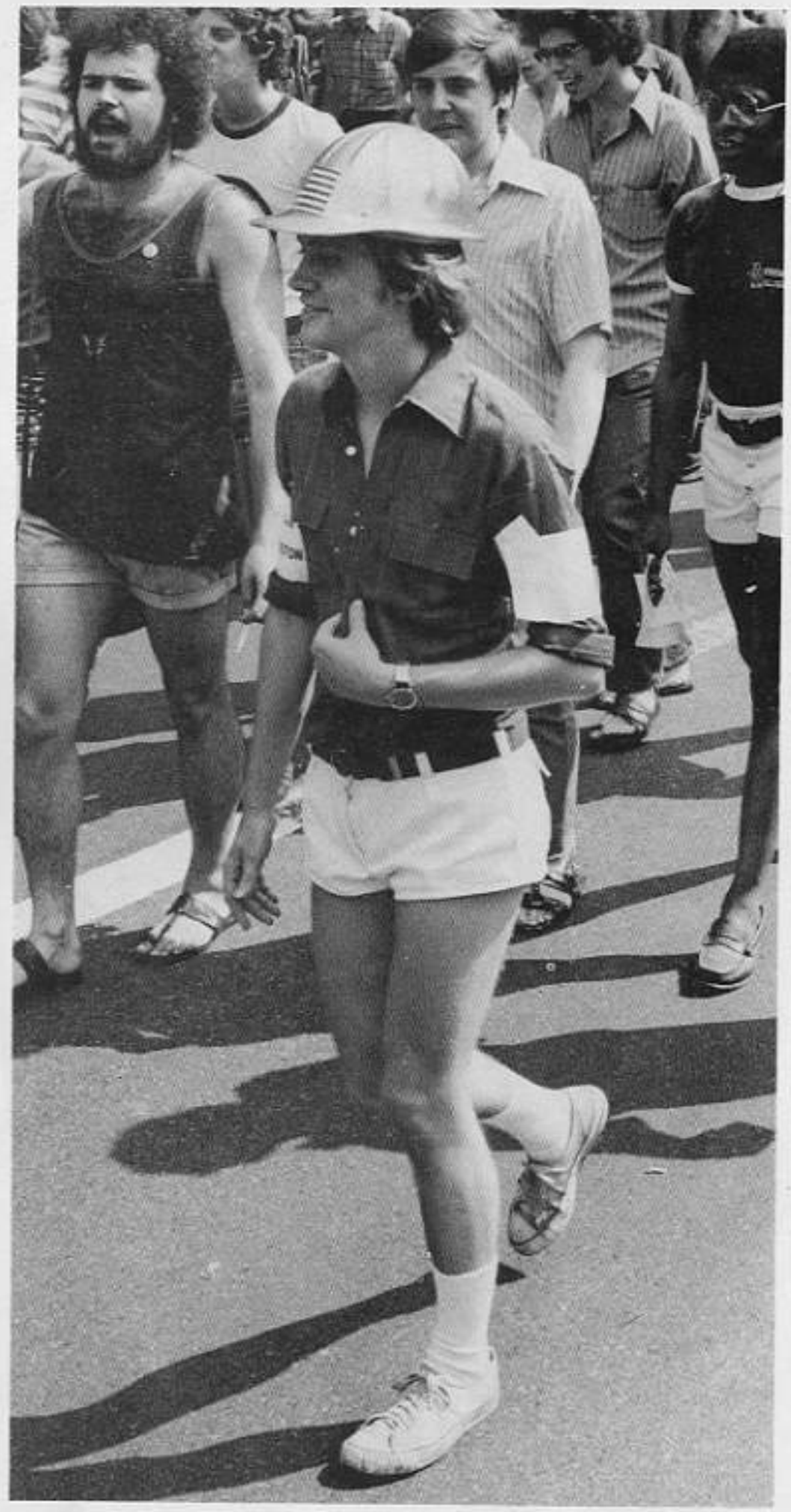
At the end of Christopher Street Liberation Day this year, when those of us on the CSLDC sat around Central Park with thousands of other Gay people and relaxed at the conclusion of another successful and joyous march, we almost forgot the problems we had over the preceding months in putting it together. In the hope that some of you reading this will consider forming a Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee in your own area to promote a 1972 observance, let me go over a few of the major problems we had this year and how they were resolved.

One of the biggest problems (and this is true of any city that has more than one Gay Lib organization) is getting the various organizations in the city to forget or at least mute their very real differences in the interest of showing a United Front on at least one day in the year, namely on Christopher Street Liberation Day. Until the final weeks of planning during June, the CSLDC's meetings are open to anyone and consequently we were "zapped" by various groups with various "demands" at a number of our meetings. And, of course, these "zaps" have to be dealt with on a very human and personal basis. It takes many hours of talking and reasoning to convince these people that it really is worthwhile to have one day in the year when Gay people and Gay organizations can come together as a community and that the only way to be successful at it is to swallow their personal organizational pride and help build Christopher Street Liberation Day to show the great diversity in our community and to show other Gay people throughout the world that we *can* be together on at least one day in the year.

Another problem which you'll have in any American city, (including New York) concerns your dealings with the police department in getting the parade permit for the march. For this year's march, we submitted our "Application for Parade Permit" in April and it wasn't approved and delivered to us until the day before the march, June 26th. In the interim, we had numerous meetings with police people and representatives from Mayor Lindsay's office (Barry Gottehrer and Ronnie Eldridge) asking when our permit would be issued. At each meeting, we received the same assurances that there was no problem; but until we got that piece of paper in our hands, we sweated.

The worst scare we had this year was on the Friday before the march. A rumor spread like wildfire through the community that all of the illegal Gay bars in the city were going to be raided on the night before the march as a result of the Knapp Commission's investigations. (The Knapp Commission is a group investigating police corruption and, in particular, collusion between the police and the "syndicate" in operating illegal after-hours bars.) It goes without saying that if there had been raids on dozens of Gay bars that night, the atmosphere and mood of Gay people at the march the next day would not have been the joyous, relaxed and happy one that it was. At best, the mood of the march would have been indifferent; and at worst, there would have been a repeat of the 1969 riots.

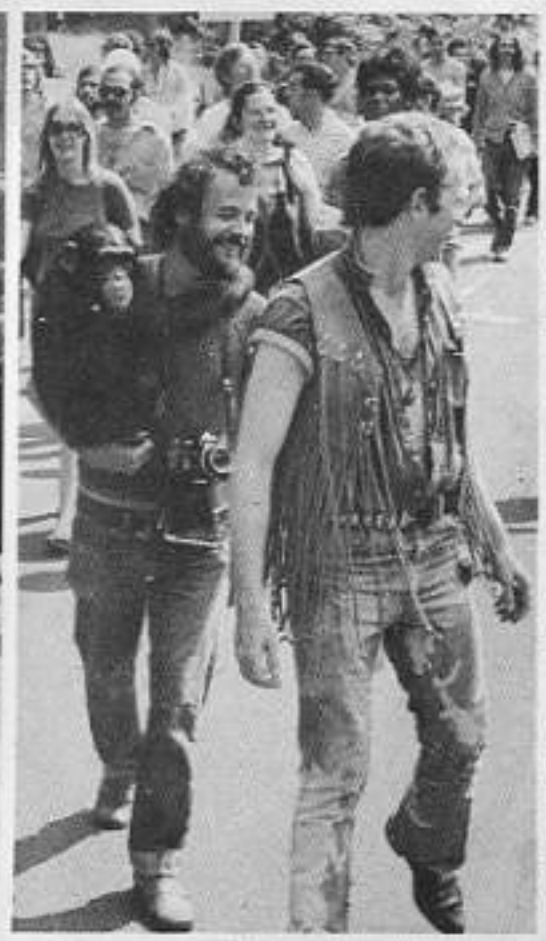
RUBEN PHOTO

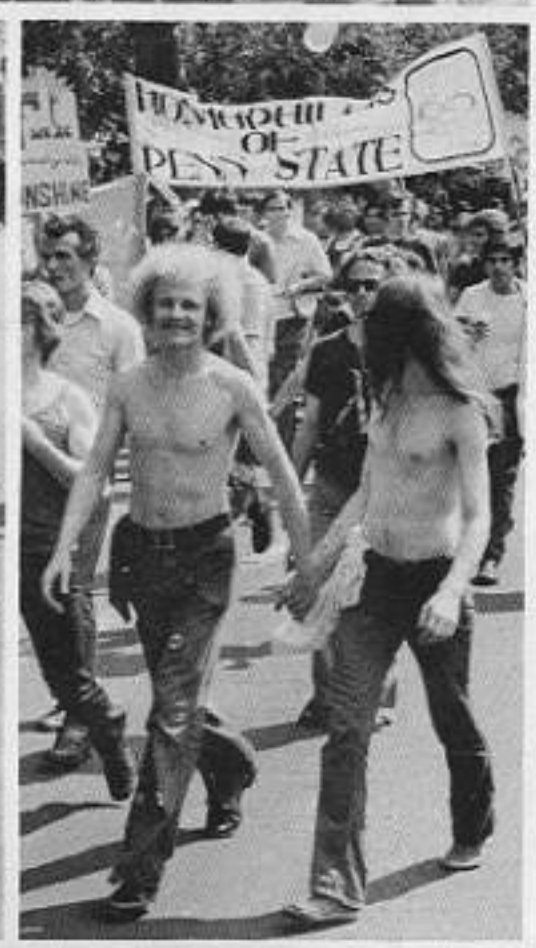


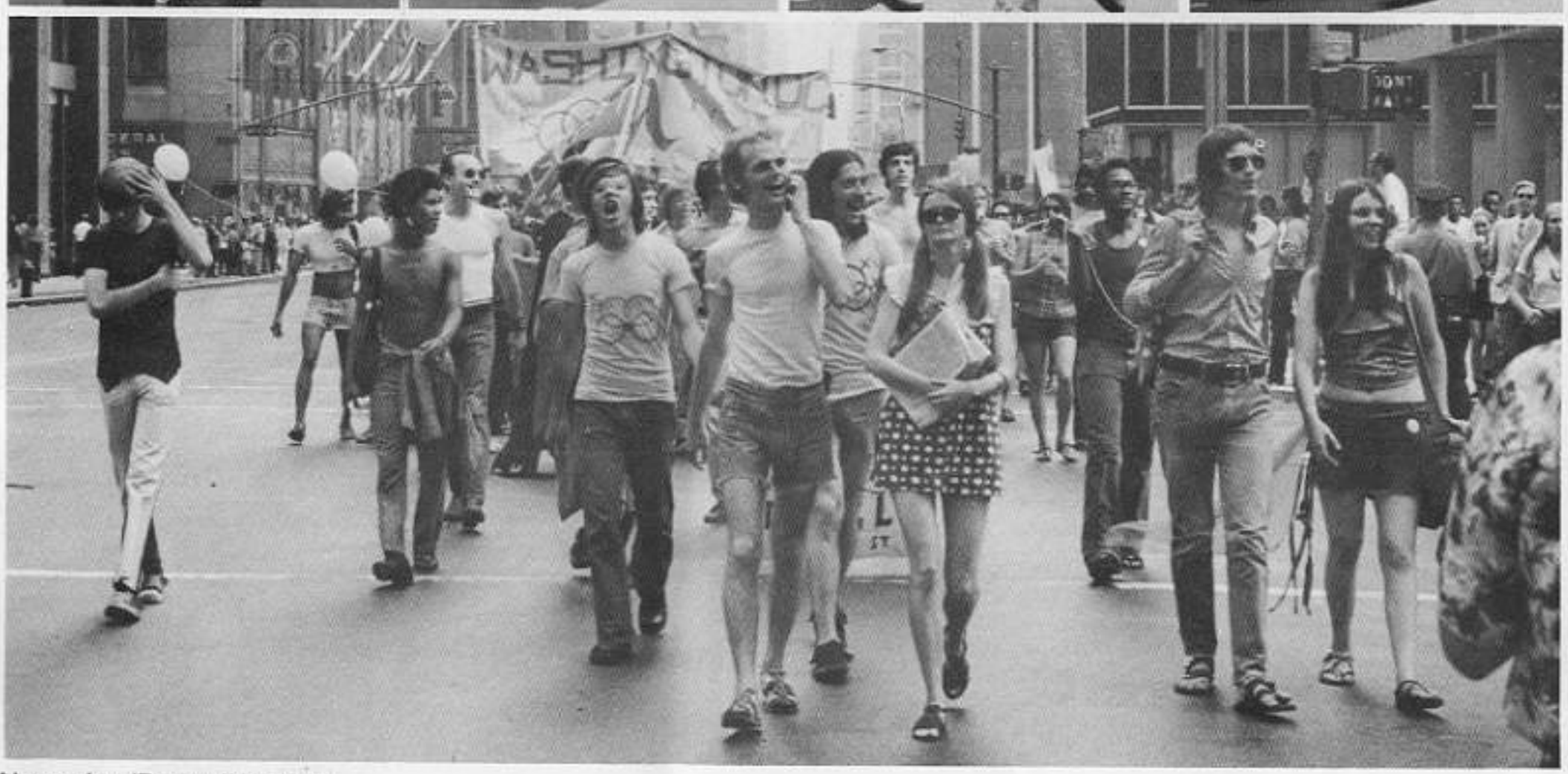
Anyway, people from the CSLDC and from the Gay organizations got on the phones and called the Mayor's office, explaining the whole situation to them and appealing to them, that if the rumor was true, to please put off the raids until the week after in the interests of peace in our community. We still don't know if the raids were originally planned for that Saturday or not; but they did take place about a month later when hundreds of Federal agents and New York City police swooped down on 9 after-hours, syndicate-controlled, Gay bars.

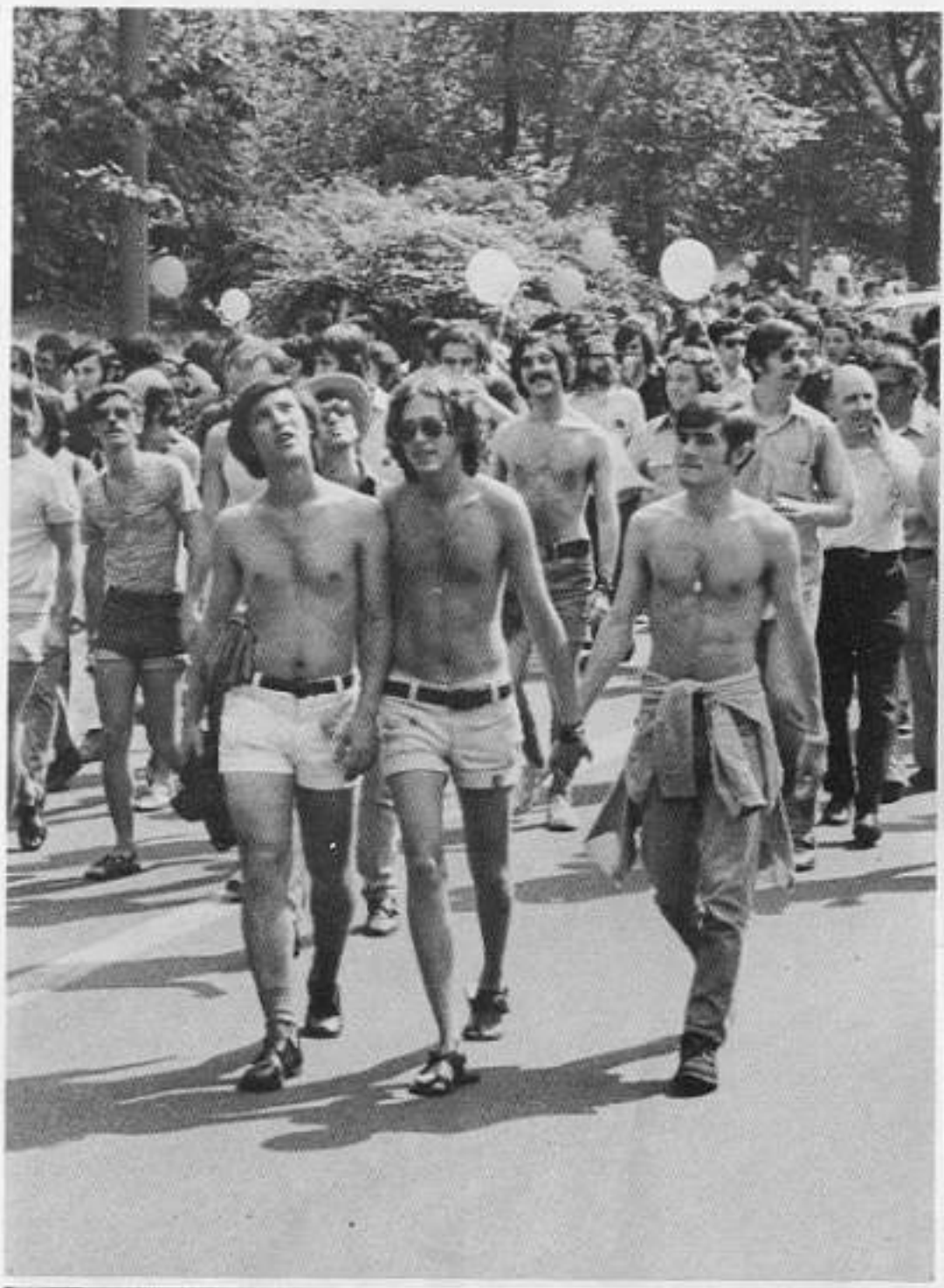
Another problem you'll have in any city are the threats that up-tight heteros will make to "break heads" at the march. The first few calls or letters of this type you'll get will probably scare you. But remember, most people who are really going to attempt something of this nature don't call and tell you about it; their real purpose is to frighten you into calling the whole thing off. Keep your cool; go ahead with your work, and take the usual precautions to assist the people by making sure adequate police protection

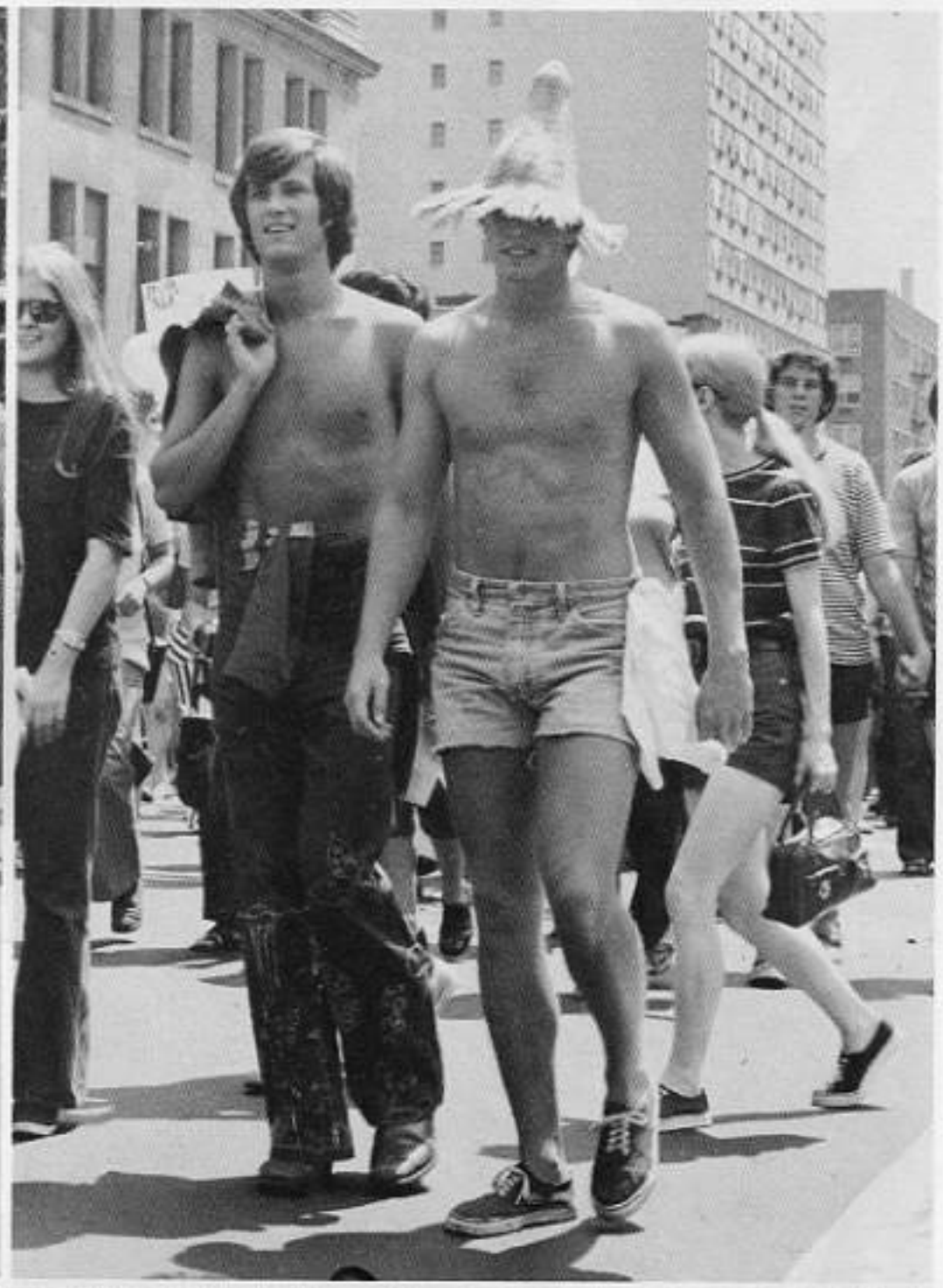
Craig Rodwell



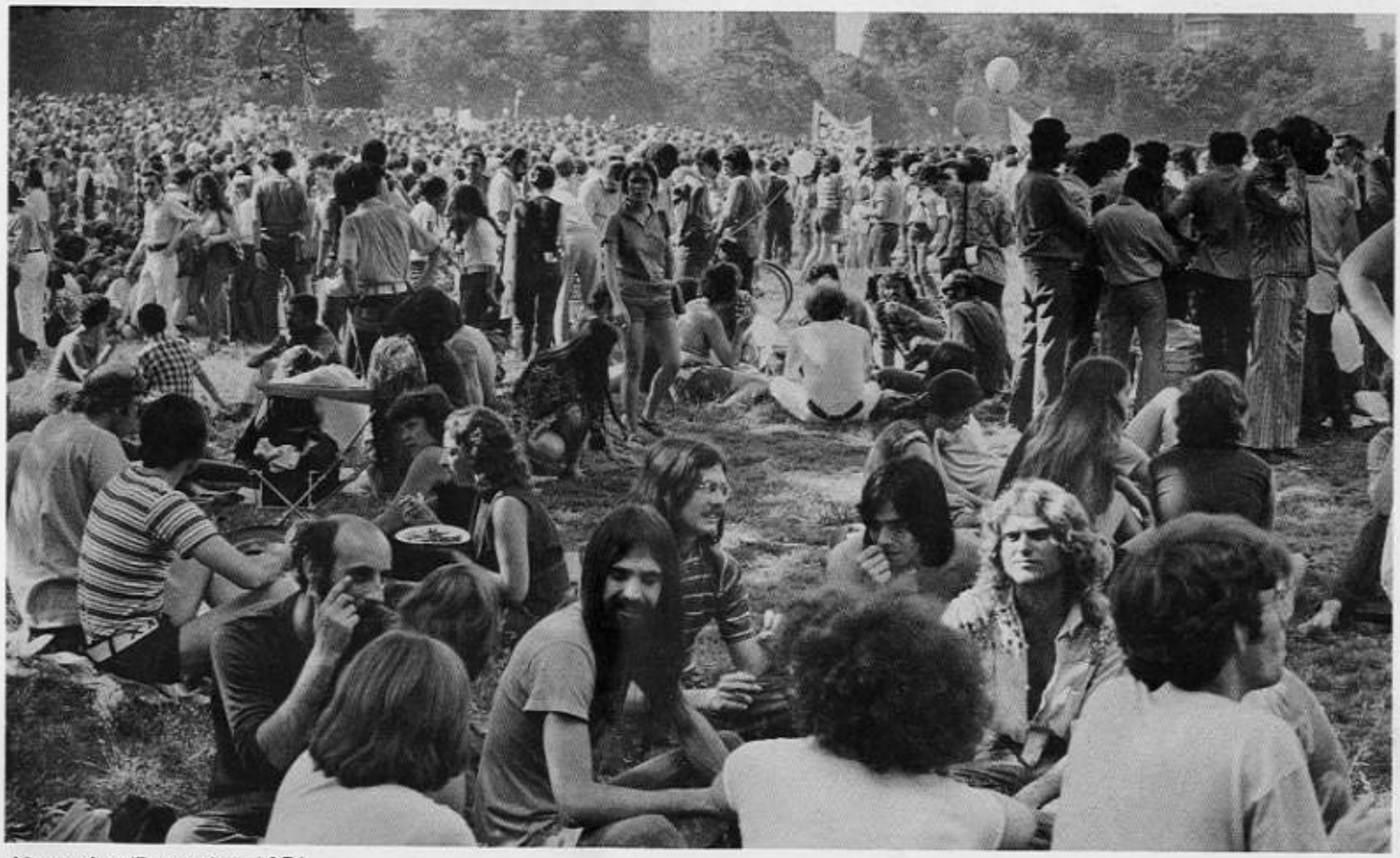








is available and by training "marshals" or "coordinators." Many, if not most, of the people who come out for Christopher Street Liberation Day marches are doing so publicly for the first time. Therefore, it is doubly important that there be people at the march who have been specially trained to give information to the people and to assure them that everything has been carefully planned and they have nothing to worry about.

I was personally very pleased to see many readers of *QQ* at this year's New York march from a number of states (as a result of the editorial in the August *QQ*). Maybe some of you, especially those I talked to from Ohio and Pennsylvania, will consider forming a Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee in your area to plan a local observance in 1972. It's not too early to start planning now; and if I can be of any help, let me know.

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