



Vernita Gray: From Woodstock to the White House

Tracy Baim, Owen Keehnen

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Vernita Gray lived through some of the country's most riveting civil-rights dramas, as an African American girl from the South Side of Chicago. She came out as a lesbian soon after attending the 1969 Woodstock concert, where she heard about the uprising at the Stonewall gay bar in New York City. Her fight for lesbian equality, and the rights of the entire LGBTQ community, would be her passion for the remaining decades of her life. She was also a poet and a writer, a key player in Chicago's gay liberation movement, and a lesbian separatist during the 1970s. In the 1980s, she opened her own restaurant, Sol Sands, and in the early 1990s, she began an 18-year career with the Cook County state's attorney's office. Along the way, she also managed to have a lot of fun. Her visits to the White House brought tears to her eyes. She never thought she would see an African-American president, especially from her hometown of Chicago. A few months after attending the Obama selection at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, she attended his inauguration and related parties in D.C. She first went to the White House for a June 2009 Pride reception. Vernita's struggle with cancer would soon take a turn for the worse, and in her final years, her passion was used to fight for both at-risk LGBTQ youth as well as marriage equality in Illinois. In this new book by Tracy Baim and Owen Keehnen, friends, partners and family share their memories of Vernita. Primarily written before Vernita's death in March 2014, the book also includes extensive interviews with Vernita, and her own poetry. Vernita loved long and deeply, she worked against racism, sexism and homophobia, and she did it all with a smile, dancing her way to victory on her last lap. Available in color on Kindle and CreateSpace.

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