

## All Stanley's Men

Bartenders are the best source of information about premises. Painters, jazzmen or writers, drinking down successive mugs of beer, may have dozens of great anecdotes, but art – their own art – has always been the most important for them. Aside from making art, they drank beer. And the more they drank, the more vague their recollections became. Bartenders didn't drink. They observed. Actually, they were paid for observing.

Stanley Tolkin was employing up to fifty people – cooks, cleaners, waiters, security guards and of course bartenders – in his two Lower East Side bars. Some of them had already had experience in gastronomy, others – like the aforementioned Walter Bowart – came from the surrounding bohemians, regular customers urgently in need of income. The owner was willingly giving them that opportunity. He knew perfectly well that a considerable part of the money paid for wages would be spent in his bar.

I came across Richard Connerty while reading “The Ephemeral New York”, a blog about forgotten places on the map of NYC. The site perhaps does not look spectacular, but it was there that I found a short mention of Stanley Tolkin. What makes this blog special – besides numberless curiosities, anecdotes and archival photographs – are its recipients: elderly New Yorkers making sentimental journeys to the land of their youth. Connerty was one of them.

My informant came from Massachusetts and he worked there initially. He earned his living as a cook in one of the restaurants on Cape Cod, popular among tourists. In winter, however, restaurants were closed, so Connerty travelled to New York seeking seasonal job. He had some kitchen experience, so he was immediately employed by Stanley. He worked in both bars, as a waiter and a bartender. Occasionally he was also a cook, when the full-time chef Mike Connor took time off. Like many young Americans, Connerty spent some time in the army. He began his service in 1961 and he was mobilized during the Cuban Missile Crisis, but he knew he was lucky anyway: if he had been drafted two years later, he would not have got out of the army so easily. Because of this episode, Connerty was annoyed with pacifist slogans of Ed Sanders and other anti-war activists sitting in a bar on Twelfth Street. After all, many of his friends were less fortunate and ended up in Vietnam. Thinking of them, he could not agree to the opinion that the United States were nothing but a ruthless aggressor and oppressor setting up a chemical laboratory in South Asia.

Connerty was the only one of my interlocutors who never became an artist, and perhaps that's why the period of work for Stanley was so important to him. The times when he met the Lower East Side celebrities stood out in his life, the rest of which was devoted to his family and full-time work in the desert south. The Connerty's reminiscences are full of anecdotes, names and details. According to him, his boss was a calm guy who rarely got excited and almost never got mad. Neither did he pose for the big fish.

“He was very non-descriptive. He always dressed the same. He wore a pair of gabardine slacks, plain leather shoes, dress shirt, and most notably he always wore a little windbreaker, a very inexpensive windbreaker. And he also had – actually he was partial to – good quality fedoras, that is Stetson hats. He always wore one. He also spent many hours at work. He was very taciturn, he was not a very chatty guy. It was not his style”

Currently Connerty lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he works for the state historic preservation officer. He is involved in reconstructions using traditional materials. Based in the Southwest, he was regularly sending me information, links to articles, and names of his old friends. One of those contacts led me to another bartender.

In 1964 Stanley Tolkin hired Joe Tobin, who, like Connerty, came to New York from Massachusetts. Initially, he slept on the floor in his friend's apartment, who ran a bar there. Thanks to this circumstances, Tobin not only had a place to stay, but also an opportunity to

learn the bartending craft, quite valued at that time. Tolkin was just opening The Dom – a club distinguished by one of the longest counters in New York. So there was a lot of work, but the salary paid for the hardships. Tobin could make as much as thirty dollars a night. It was a lot in those days. And the club was just getting started. It was supposed to be more crowded. It was supposed to be better.

When Tolkin opened a disco in one of the two rooms of The Dom, Tobin's work changed. Instead of standing behind the counter, he moved to the kitchen, where he made drinks for guests dancing to the rhythm of soul and R&B all evening long. Waiters came to him with orders, and he prepared high-proof cocktails, most often rusty nail, a mixture of Scotch and Drambuie. He lost opportunity to get tips, so the owner offered him a good, fixed salary. The work in the kitchen seemed to be a change for the better, but it also brought with it some risks. The infinite number of free drinks was quite a temptation for a young man who wasn't a teetotaler. Tobin remembered this period as a true test of character. To rise to this challenge, he decided to give up alcohol completely. There was no other solution. The half-measures didn't work.

Tobin was alone in the struggle with his weaknesses, because his boss did not breathe down his neck. Tolkin preferred to spend time at Stanley's – his first bar, where he obviously felt more comfortable. He was an ordinary guy whereas The Dom was often visited by celebrities. His background and his style was the one of the working class. Stanley was neither cool, nor trendy. He was rather a tough guy of the fifties, maybe even the forties. According to Tobin, his boss didn't even consider himself a businessman. It was beyond his capabilities. And yet nobody questioned that he was a serious player in the world of New York entertainment.

Tobin's strong character, shaped at the back of the popular premises, turn out to be useful in the place he had left New York for. After a few years of work as a bartender for Stanley he moved to Hollywood. While in California, he decided to take his mother's maiden name. She was an actress, so he believed this change would bring him luck. Since then, as Tobin Bell, he's been pursuing acting career, and his role of a sadistic psychopath in a series of horror films *Saw* earned him some popularity. However, I was more interested in the role of an English teacher he took on in The Dom's kitchen backstage.

His disciple was Jacques Coursil, a trumpeter who had just arrived in New York from his native Martinique and worked in The Dom as a dishwasher. He did not know the country, the city, the milieu and urgently needed to get a foothold. He fortunately heard about a businessman from the Lower East Side who – reportedly – employed not only people with experience in gastronomy, but also musicians, painters and poets. Coursil applied to him and immediately got a job. Today, he claims that it was easy for him to come across Tolkin because he rented from him an apartment near Tompkins Square. Much of the money earned by Coursil in the kitchen went back into the pockets of his employer and landlord.

Washing dishes is not one of the most enjoyable and ennobling jobs, but Coursil claims that there were some good sides of working at The Dom. Above all, some eminent jazzmen performed in the club. The band playing there, led by clarinettist Tony Scott, was often joined by local instrumentalists. Almost all most outstanding American jazz musicians played at that time in The Five Spot, the jazz mecca situated across the street. Musicians were constantly hanging around St. Mark's Place, so Scott easily recruited genuine masters. Coursil, a novice trumpeter, had them all close at hand. He could not only listen to them, but also ask for advice. They encouraged him to practice, gave him hints, and even offered lessons.

„Such was the spirit of the Lower East Side then. And maybe America as a whole? People just wanted to help each other”.

Another advantage of working in the club at St. Mark's Place was the presence of Tobin Bell. Coursil spent with him a lot of time in the bar kitchen. When they had enough time, the American taught his friend English. There were no teaching aids available and the curriculum did not include grammar. The focus was mainly on vocabulary, and song lyrics were often helpful. Fifty years later, Coursil recites from memory successive lines of *The Gypsy Rover*, an Irish song, one of Bell's favourites. The two employees of The Dom became close friends; Tobin was Coursil's best man at his wedding, although the latter spent only a year working in Tolkin's kitchen.

There were several reasons for his quitting the job. First of all, he was threatened with deportation. In order to avoid it, Coursil became a teacher of French and mathematics at the United Nations schools. There were many advantages of the new occupation. First of all, it was not a full-time job, so he could spend more time playing music. Teaching young people paid off for other reasons as well. One of his disciples was a future composer and saxophonist John Zorn, who was to become one of the most influential figures of the American avant-garde music. Topics discussed by Coursil with his students included phrasal stress in Flaubert's prose rather than free jazz improvisation, yet Zorn kept good memories of his somewhat eccentric teacher. Several decades later he found Coursil and offered him releasing his music. The album titled *Minimal Brass* was issued in 2005 by the prestigious label Tzadik Records, although both musicians contacted from a distance, for Coursil had left the States many years before. He returned to Europe and now lives in Germany.

Connerty, Tobin and Coursil left New York – Ray Grist, my next informant, stayed there. Before he managed to make a living as a painter, he had been serving beer in the city's most fashionable places for years. We made an appointment in Upper Manhattan. Grist, an experienced bartender, suggested we meet near my New York living place. After several days of running around the perfectly perpendicular crossroads of crowded Manhattan – 1st and 7th, 114th and 5th, and so on – I welcomed this offer with unbelievable relief. Finally, I could give up the perpetual game with New York topography for a while. We showed up at the agreed crossroads almost simultaneously. Grist, with a hat and thick glasses, was cheerful, despite it was about to rain. His blissful serenity was quite contagious. A light drizzle soon made people fill the nearby cafés, but finally we managed to find a place for ourselves. Grist was straightforward and relevant. He avoided hyperbole and stylistic ornamentation. He weighed his words. He was someone to be elected to the jury in the first place – probably even if he were a culprit.

He was born in Harlem and moved to the neighbourhood of the Stanley's Bar in the late fifties. During this period, artists began to move to Alphabet City. They became customers of local bars and restaurants, many of them run by Poles or Ukrainians. Stanley Tolkin was the one who decided to open up to the New York bohemians. It's hard to say whether Stanley was sympathetic to the new residents of the Lower East Side or whether he predicted that a change of attitude would simply pay off. Grist liked the atmosphere of the beatniks-friendly club so much that he decided to work there. However, before becoming a bartender he had to do military service. As he confessed, boredom was the only enemy he had fought in the army.

"I did nothing, absolutely nothing. Really. I had my orders after basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey to go to Fort Bliss, Texas. I went to them and I said: 'I'm not going' and of course they said: 'What do you mean by not going? You are in the army and you had to follow orders!' So I went to everybody up to the inspector general which was the highest rank to go. I said 'I am not going,' and he said 'Why?' and I said 'My wife is white, she is Jewish, and you know the Connally [executive] order.' So he said: 'You are not going to Texas, you can stay right here, in Fort Dix.' And I stayed in Fort Dix for two years."

Connally was the governor of Texas and a very influential politician. He was the one riding in the limousine with JFK when the president was assassinated. The regulation introduced by him had impact on soldiers from mixed families. Grist as an African-American and a white woman's husband could not leave his military base while stationing in Texas. Any departure from the base would immediately result in his expulsion from the state. Evidently, this regulation was disputed even by officers taught not to ask questions.

Grist returned to New York in 1964 to find out that Lower East Side is no longer the same.

“Stanley was happy to see me, he knew me even before all these artists started hanging out and he still had Polish people drinking in his bar. When I came back from the army, they basically didn't come anymore. He couldn't understand their dislike of the new customers; after all, he himself was extremely open-minded. His bar was one of those sites in New York that allowed for the transition from late fifties through the sixties into the contemporary times. Precisely because people could be themselves here. In my opinion, that was very important. This evolutionary way of making the change. The change which later spread to the whole country, to the whole world.”

According to Grist, it was because of reluctance of conservative Poles that I could find no mention of Tolkin in Polish American press. Stanley's character did not help either. He was secretive and felt most comfortably in the background. Although he welcomed guests at the doorstep and fulfilled their wishes, he never imposed himself to anyone. He smiled, remained vigilant, and quietly pursued his plan. And if he was disturbed by offended compatriots, brawling guests or burglars, he didn't care – he had people to fix this. Charlie „Devil” Green was one of them.

“Yeah, Charlie! A really good guy. Very sweet man . . . He's in jail, isn't he?”

He was. In the morning of September 19, 1983, Charlie Green burst into a Harlem drug den with a gun. According to police investigation, it was 6:15, so the tenants were probably still asleep. Two of them were killed at the scene. When the ambulance arrived, the third one was diagnosed with brain death. He died in the hospital. The other two were seriously injured. Sweet Charlie Green was already on the 16th floor and threatened to jump. He didn't jump. So he was sentenced to life imprisonment with the possibility of parole after forty-five years. He was serving his sentence in a high-security prison in Shawangunk, upstate New York, . A stone's throw away from the house of Floyd Patterson, a heavyweight champion, to whom Green only succumbed in the tenth round during the memorable fight in Madison Square Garden.

Green promised well as a boxer. He had enough relentlessness, and his right hook was legendary. Fast legs easily kept up with his opponents. Unfortunately, his head couldn't keep up. Robert Mladinich, an author of a big article on Green, suggested that in the fifties mental problems had prevented him from joining the marines. However, they did not prevent him from meeting Stanley, who needed him more than the American army.

The Lower East Side did not enjoy the reputation of being New York's safest neighbourhood at the time. Risky situations sometimes took place not only in the streets of Lower Manhattan but also in local premises. The task of Charlie Green and his people was to make it happen as little as possible. But they not always succeeded.

“One night in a dancehall place was packed, Tobin Bell recalls. And there was a guy from the US Naval Academy. He was in uniform, he looked very snappy . . . He was dancing on the dancefloor with somebody and he left his cigarette lighter. It was zippo, with the US Naval Academy insignia. When he went back to his table, it was gone. Somebody said: ‘Those guys took it.’ And he followed three guys outside and said ‘Hey give me my lighter back.’ They almost killed him, they got him in the doorway and they almost beaten him to

death. I'll always remember the horror that I felt when I saw what was left of him. I was in shock. In an instant, a very clean, in uniform, precise crisp guy was turned to a bloody mess.”

Similar events were less common at Stanley's Bar. But acts of violence did happen there too. One such difficult customer was Mac, a local troublemaker. He must have fallen foul of Stanley because he was banned from the bar.

Connerty recalls: “One night Mac stormed into the bar. Helen told him to leave. And he actually slapped her. He gave her a big blow. He was a big guy. Stanley came over with Charlie Green. When he heard what had happened to his wife, Charlie immediately set out to find Mac. It did not take long. After less than an hour Charlie walked back into the bar as if nothing had happened and Mac never came back around bar anymore. And he was a pretty tough guy. You know, Charlie had a reputation for violence, and Stanley wouldn't let anyone mistreat his family.”

One might wonder how Charlie Green combined his Lower East Side activity with his career as a professional boxer. After all, a turbulent nightlife does not go hand in hand with a training regime. I have found the answer in the account of the match of Green and José Torres, [a celebrated Puerto Rican boxer, who had won a silver medal at the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne]. It was the most famous Green's fight. In 1966 Torres was still a champion, and although his career was slowly finishing, he was still one of the best boxers in his weight class. Combating him in the ring was all the harder because he was supported by fanatical Latino fans. Also that night they gathered in great numbers in the Madison Square Garden to support their idol who was to fight with Jimmy Ralston. However, Ralston didn't get there. He disappeared a few hours before the match. Green laughed later that he had gotten the jitters.

The organizers desperately needed a substitute who would dare to combat the famous José Torres. It could be only a madman. When Green found out about that, he was just about to finish his hot dog and drink it with his favourite beer. He agreed immediately. Perhaps he was a little bit nervous, for he smoked a joint before entering the hall, but his behaviour didn't reveal it. After a while he was already in the ring and – to everyone's surprise – he began to beat Torres mercilessly, and defeated him both in the first and second round. Eventually, Torres pulled himself together and knocked Green out, yet – regardless of the final result – it was one of the fights that contributed to building the legend of the latter.

I hoped that visiting Green would broaden my knowledge about American boxing. I learned from the penitentiary staff that in recent years he had been transferred from Shawangunk to The Alden High Security Prison – the same institution where Mark David Chapman, John Lennon's killer, was incarcerated. But before I could react to that news, I got another one: it was too late. Charlie Green died in November 2014.

Grist did not change his attitude towards Charlie Green after learning about his further fate. His personal fondness was mixed with appreciation usually given to sports idols. Charlie wasn't the only boxer who worked for Stanley, although no other of those vivid yet aggressive figures was considered a World Champion candidate. One of them was an old-fashioned Irishman, wearing tweed jackets, and smoking a pipe, who would kindly apologize the troublemakers for inconvenience while throwing them out. There was also a Korean guy, who came to New York to study composition at Juilliard or Mannes, hired to be a doorkeeper in The Dom. Although he had several black belts [in martial arts], he quickly quit because he did not want to use violence. Charlie and his boys did not feel reluctant to do that. Sometimes the victims would come back to the premise – those times already with guns. According to Grist, one night things went so far out that the staff had to flee for life. A crew armed to the teeth parked in front of the bar. The thugs had been treated badly so they returned ready to kill everyone.

Stanley had problems with his doorkeepers, but on the other hand he gave them a free hand. If a customer was not willing to pay, they were allowed to persuade him to do so by every possible means. Their brutality sometimes had negative consequences. Coursil remembers a customer who pulled out a knife and, waving it blindly, wounded six random people. He got mad because a moment earlier he had been hit by doorkeepers for not paying the bill. However they made a mistake and the hit man was innocent. Stanley was ready for such inconveniences. He kept both feet on the ground. He could be ruthless, maybe even cruel. Yet he thought that even the most sincere desires and lofty ideas were not enough for him to survive in this business. So Charlie Green was indispensable. Even if he was a ticking bomb himself.

Late at night Green often escorted his boss carrying home daily turnover taken from the cashbox. Bartenders usually informed the customers that no more orders would be accepted and then they called Stanley, who showed up on the spot ten minutes later, went out in the middle of the premise, rang the bell and communicated in a raised voice: "Time, ladies and gentlemen, it's time!". When the last marauders left the bar, the door was locked. That was a sacred rule. Too often it happened that a moment after the bar was closed someone knocked on the door to inform in an apologetic tone that he had left his wallet or a lighter. When an unwise bartender opened the door, he immediately felt a touch of a gun barrel on his temple. Connerty recalls that Stanley would do one more thing that proved his extraordinary cleverness: just before going home he would put a twenty-dollar bill on the cashbox. There was always a chance that a potential burglar would be content with such an easy profit without damaging the cashbox.

This shrewdness combined with a dose of bravado was useful when Stanley sued corrupt police officers. They were not the only representatives of the authorities demanding bribes from him. Connerty recalls that one day a man unknown to anyone entered the kitchen. He showed his badge and informed that he was a sanitary inspector, and he demanded immediate talk to the premise's owner.

'You know, Mr. Tolkin, I see numerous problems here. Take the refrigerator, for example: a temperature is too high. Also, look at the food. It is not stored properly, to say the least. And I see more deficiencies like that. I hate to say it, but you have to pay a two hundred and fifty dollar fine.'

'Well, so what are we going to do about it?'

'You know, I also represent a certain orphanage. If you'd like to make a donation to that orphanage, I can promise you it would be appreciated.'

'What amount do you mean?'

'I think a hundred dollars should be enough.'

'You see, that sounds really good, but I just deposited the money and have no cash right now. Would you be so kind and come tomorrow?'

'No problem.'

The next day the guy showed up again, and Stanley was already waiting for him in his room behind the desk. He offered to discuss again the unpleasant problem that brought the officer here and how to solve it. The inspector repeated that a hundred bucks would solve the problem. The owner of The Dom nodded his head and called Charlie Green to bring the money. When the bodyguard entered the room, Stanley opened the drawer and pulled the tape recorder out. By that time, Green was already standing behind his boss's back and staring with a menacing eyes at the corrupt official. After a long silence, Stanley suggested that the briber should leave and never come back. From then on, Tolkin had no problems with the temperature in the fridges again.

In the sixties, the reputation of the NYPD was quite poor. Escalation of anti-establishment attitudes among young Americans was not the only reason. Bribers and corrupt

officers, representing interests of gangs and lobbyists, were the common motives of stories of that era. Venal policemen also came to Stanley and demanded money like ordinary racketeers. However, they were even less lucky than the sanitary officer mentioned by Connerty. Stanley never yielded. Even worse: he filed the case. Prosecutors opened an investigation and – according to businessmen close to him – the bribers were eventually punished.

It is worth mentioning that the case was still on before the image disaster of the NYPD when *The New York Times* published a series of articles showing the scale of corruption in police ranks. The charges were all the stronger because they came from a policeman, Frank Serpico, who decided to break with professional solidarity, treated among his colleagues almost like a Mafia conspiracy of silence. As a result of the shocking news published in the press, the mayor of New York appointed the Knapp Commission, which proved the enormous abuse of the city police. The carefully prepared report, over two hundred and fifty pages long, left no doubt: in New York the classic division between police and thieves was purely conventional. If suitably bribed, the officers provided protection for dealers, covered up murders, discouraged witnesses from testifying. The document showed that corrupt police officers for five thousand dollars revealed names of their informants to gangsters which meant a death sentence to the former. No wonder that the journalist who publicized the testimony of Frank Serpico and David Durek, his companion, was afraid for their lives. He was right: in 1971, during a seemingly routine interrogation, Serpico was seriously shot. He noticed that something was wrong when a suspected drug dealer started locking the door. He was also concerned about the fact that none of his partners were in sight. When he turned around to call for backup, the dealer pulled the gun and shot him right in the face. Fortunately, before Serpico fell, he managed to pull the trigger of his gun too and shot his attacker. Although Serpico's life was in danger, none of accompanying policemen helped him, nor even call for an ambulance. Serpico was rescued only by an elderly Latino living in the neighborhood, who made a call.

The story of “an honorable cop” inspired the famous film starring Al Pacino. However the Hollywood movie's happy end differed from the reality. Serpico did indeed receive the Medal of Honor, but his career as a policeman was finished. In an interview given in 2010 he admitted that a New York museum did not even want to accept his uniform and revolver. Officially he was a hero, but he was never invited to galas or conferences. Pieces of bullet stuck in his head, in the immediate vicinity of his brain, were his only “connection” to the police. In fact even fifty years after his action he still suffered periodic headaches.

It must be admitted, however, that – as far as police is concerned – the situation in New York was all the more complicated. Besides mobsters with police badges, there was also plenty of righteous officers who only looked like hoodlums. Plainclothes men were an indispensable part of the Lower East Side. They were present in The Dom, visited by Jackie Kennedy, activists of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, black nationalists and ordinary mobsters. They all showed up at the place which was called by Grist – certainly, quite exaggerating – “the first New York's disco”.

“Studio 54 became the very famous disco in New York and in the country. People thought it was the first place where all these celebrities used to hang out, but that was later. You could say that Studio came straight out of The Dom.”

Grist even met one female secret officer visiting Stanley's bar. She was interested in one of regular customers. He was an elegant, wealthy man, who did not seek company. He would order scotch on the rocks and stay aside. Sometimes he exchanged a few words with Grist and when he realized that his interlocutor was not a professional bartender, but an artist recruited by Stanley, he became particularly fond of him. From those short conversations, Grist concluded that the solitary customer had to be a high-profile gangster. His hypothesis was confirmed by the girl who was not distracted from the elegant man. She worked for the

secret service and officially informed Grist about this fact. He did not believe it, so she began to list towns he had visited during his trip to Spain. Grist went there when the American army was already interested in him. Wherever he checked in, letters from Washington came immediately. He was thanked for letting the services know of his next move. They played cat and mouse with him. He was observed. The observation would turn into notes. The notes were put on file. A mysterious woman in the bar knew Grist through and through.

It would seem that a bartender who can get along with both gangsters and detectives is precious for any premises' owners. And indeed Grist was precious. And yet Tolkin finally fired him – because of girls.

“Stanley was always going after with these beautiful girls. And a lot of them would say: ‘Oh, no, Stanley, we can’t because we’re with Ray.’ So he got tired of that. And he fired me under any pretext.”

This latest incident (and all of the abovementioned ones) did not change Ray’s opinion of Stanley: the former bartender considered him a good businessman and appreciated his openness – also to art. After all, it was in the bar situated at the crossing of 12th Street and Avenue B where Grist presented his paintings for the first time.

Joey Skaggs confirms Stanley’s support of local artists.

“I was impressed by his sensitivity and understanding that young people need to be given opportunities. One day he just came to my apartment and said: ‘Okay, you can exhibit your works at my place!’. I was a budding painter! I think it was great.”

Lennox Raphael, a playwright, painter and poet, speaks in a similar tone.

“When I returned to New York after a year and a half in Rio, I organized an exhibition at Stanley’s. The only request he has was if he could see my paintings before. He liked them so much that he not only exhibited them, but also bought some. In a way, he was our patron. A benefactor of the Lower East Side art community.”

Ronald Sukenick in his autobiography *Down and In – Life in the Underground: Bohemian to Hip to Beat to Rock and Punk - Mutiny in American Culture* also praised Tolkin:

I used to watch Stanley hooking the new hip population of the East Village, working them with free beers and sympathetic talk at a time when the rest of the locals regarded these strange guys with beards who didn’t work, and their bra-less girls . . . with at best mild contempt. . . . Stanley liked us. That wasn’t why every third beer was free at the beginning. The frequency went down as business went up, but he was still occasionally generous with the regulars. He liked having interesting, educated people as customers. He liked the girls with their new sexy styles. Stanley was all friendly host. (p. 161)

Ed Sanders was also willing to tell me about Stanley’s support. He recalled how he had been impressed by the forty-something year old Pole backing countercultural freaks and “wild pacifists.” Tolkin did not provide financial aid, but facilitated distribution of underground press.

“I would leave copies and Stanley would hand them out to other artists who came into the bar. He had a whole stack of my magazines behind the bar and he would hand them out to people”.

The authors published by Sanders in his *Fuck You! Magazine of Art* included, among others, W.H. Auden, a pious traditionalist, Allen Ginsberg, a rebel of Jewish roots, and LeRoi Jones, a black nationalist. They all met at the bar on 12th Street.

In the early sixties the premise changed its character a little: the basement – with wooden panels and a small stage – was added. The redwood decorations quickly became one of Stanley’s hallmarks – along with marble urinals, so big that they could serve as showers. In



the basement alcohol was served by two bartenders: Connerty and George, one of the few workers older than the owner. He was about seventy and had started his bartending career during the Prohibition era, together with Stanley's parents. He was no longer in good health and wanted to retire very much, but Stanley asked him to train Connerty to make drinks before taking a well-deserved retirement. In fact, Connerty had already had some practice in this field, so his training took only a few days. The young bartender not only got to know how to make "Tom Collins" and "Old Fashioned", but also learned some history. It turned out that George, a former subject of Emperor Franz Joseph I, during World War I had served in the Austro-Hungarian army as a machine gun operator. His surprising life managed to contain several different worlds: he fought on the front of the Great War in Europe, worked in a New York speakeasy during the Prohibition era, and finally taught hippies how much whisky a good Manhattan should have. Indeed, George had a lot to recollect when he retired.

Connerty deepened his expertise in cocktail preparation listening to small jazz combos, which from that moment on could perform on Avenue B. Certainly, when decision to enlarge the premises was made, improvement of the artistic offer was not the main issue. Stanley's Bar was more profitable having two floors. However, poor Lower East Side bohemians considered themselves not simply customers of Tolkin. Stanley's was their place, and the owner, depending on the situation, was their companion, patron and a good uncle. Tolkin happened to serve free beer and was reluctant to reach for his eighty-six gun – and these were not the only manifestations of his empathy. Young African-Americans had no doubt about his support in the issues they considered the most important.

Brenda Walcott, a poet, recalls: "I remember a gesture of support from Stanley that meant a lot to me. We were planning to take part in the March on Washington. You know, the one where Martin Luther King gave his famous 'I Have a Dream' speech. As for logistics, it was quite an action, so the day before we met at Stanley's to discuss everything again over an evening beer. When we came in there were boxes of sandwiches awaiting us. Stanley had prepared them with our departure for Washington in mind."

According to Brenda, as for Stanley, he didn't care about the International or the White House authorities; it was simply manifestation of his openness and tolerance.

"For me he was a kind of symbol. A person who wants to meet others despite cultural differences. I wasn't alone in this view and that's why Afro-Americans started to hang out at his place. They rarely frequented Polish pubs but at Stanley's they felt that they were welcome and that wasn't very common."

However, not all customers could count on such a favour of Tolkin. He was the hero for African-American activists, representatives of counterculture and artists of all kinds, though there was a group discriminated by him. From archival New York press I learned that he did not serve homosexuals. In fact, it was quite a common practice at that time.

It is hard to believe today, but the State Liquor Authority – the city's department for supervising the production and distribution of alcoholic beverages – referring to a 1940 precedent used to fine owners of bars that served homosexuals. According to New York officials, the presence of gay people in such places was a "violation of social order". As a result, bartenders ordered homosexuals to sit facing windows, so they would not "demoralize other customers"; others simply refused serving them beer and ordered to leave the premise. Although this practice was a blatant violation of the US constitution, the situation of gay people began to change only in the second half of the sixties.

One day of April 1966, at noon, a group of activists set off on a special mission from bar to bar: after announcing their orientation, they would order a beer. The group was followed by journalists representing less conservative press. The activists intended to publicize the discrimination and draw attention of the New York Human Rights Commission to this issue. They achieved their goal: service was refused to them in the Julius Bar in

Greenwich Village. Before they got there, they visited several other places where they were usually not served either. One of them was The Dom – at the entrance there was supposedly a sign saying that gay people were being asked to stay outside. It was quite early and the club was closed so we can only speculate how Stanley would have reacted to their visit. The historical 1966 event is now known as the *sip-in*.

The law in force in New York was not only cruel but simply stupid, because sexual orientation of customers was not always obvious. Sometimes, however, there was no doubt about it and bartenders had to decide: should they risk losing their jobs or their faces? One of the bartenders who used to work at The Dom told me that one day after he had learned from Tolkin about the new regulation, Allen Ginsberg entered the premises. Informed in an apologetic manner that today he could not be served, the poet left without protesting. Fortunately, the regulation soon was lifted. Club owners felt relief for refusal to serve such celebrities as Allen Ginsberg was nothing but absolute nonsense.

The poet Ed Sanders defended Stanley.

“I don’t think Allen Ginsberg had any problems because of it. On the contrary, I well remember that we went to Stanley’s bar in 1965 early when Allen first got back from his travels to Japan. He and I ordered a beer and talked about things . . . We discussed about his impressions of the trip, just the way we always did. I don’t think Stanley – not in my view, or in my knowledge – was anti-homosexual. Moreover, I’d be surprised if he was. There were a lot of gay people there on Lower East Side in the sixties . . . and no one cared about it. Southern Manhattan was a bastion of that culture.”

It is hard to understand why a year later homosexuals were no longer welcome at Tolkin’s premise. Perhaps – as the bartender suggested – this situation was only incidental and could possibly result from problems with the corrupt police. When I met other Tolkin’s friends, I heard another hypothesis: the clubs that ignored the city’s regulations attracted gays, while Stanley was happy with his hitherto customers and did not want The Dom to become a gay club. Despite his progressive views on class or racial issues, he was not so tolerant regarding homosexuality. He did not come from the milieu of liberal American intellectuals – who, in fact, also weren’t overly open to gays at the time. The abovementioned “sip-in” did not change the situation. A breakthrough event in the timeline of the fight for homosexual rights was the riots in the Stonewall gay bar in 1969. A crowd of several hundred people attacked the police carrying out a routine raid. These incidents are believed to mark the beginning of the LGBT movement.

Interestingly enough, Allen Ginsberg himself had a nice memories of The Dom. In an interview he gave to the *Rolling Stone* magazine commemorating twentieth anniversary of The Beatles’ performance on The Ed Sullivan Show, he described the night when he heard *I Want to Hold Your Hand* hit single played on the jukebox. Ginsberg claimed that it was the first time that music made him dance spontaneously.

After reading this confession, I realized that talking to Stanley’s family and employees could not be sufficient to understand him and his views. I had to meet his favourite guests: black poets, Warhol’s entourage, anti-war activists, visual artists and jazzmen – especially that not all of those cabals were described in monographs giving them justice. Media have never been focused on left-wing African-American writers or visual artists with critical attitude toward the art market. I wanted to meet them all to find out what artists Stanley had supported, but also to understand why many of them were treated like pariahs by the cultural mainstream. Following them also allowed me to look at the sixties – the decade of Woodstock and Kennedy – from the perspective of those whose membership of American society was questioned: anarchists, black nationalists, Trotskyists, but also drug addicts and mixed marriages.

They all knew it was good to have Tolkin as a friend.

But before I started meeting with regulars of the Lower East Side premises, I had to leave New York.

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