



American LGBTQ+ liberation from day 1 to Stonewall.

Written & produced by Devlyn Camp

Episode released June 27, 2020

queerserial@gmail.com

Season 2, Episode 4A: “Letter to the ACLU”

Visit www.queerserial.com for resources and additional information.

For images to accompany the story, follow the show [@queerserial](https://www.instagram.com/queerserial) on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/queerserial) & [Twitter](https://twitter.com/queerserial)

The original Mattachine Society jester logo is courtesy of ONE Archives at the USC Libraries.

This transcript includes text from real homophile-era publications, letters, organizational documents, et cetera. These texts contain **identifying terms** that may now be out of date.

AUDIO: typewriter

FRANK KAMENY: To Whom It May Concern at the American Civil Liberties Union: On **August 29, 1956**, in the San Francisco area, where I was attending meetings of the American Astronomical Society, I was approached while in a public men's room, and, for less than 5 seconds, was sexually molested by another man. There was neither solicitation nor invitation on my part, nor was there any physical, emotional, sexual, or other response of any sort. I brushed him aside, adjusted my clothing, and was departing, alone, when I was arrested by two plainclothes policemen who had witnessed the incident through an overhead grillwork.

HOST: He wanted to be an astronomer since he was 6 years old. Through his entire childhood, he dreamed of going to the moon. He started the high school astronomy club. He majored in Physics at Queens College when he was 16. The 1942 blackouts during WWII each night allowed him to see the sky more clearly. But then he was serving in that war.

MILITARY OFFICER: Do you experience homosexual tendencies?

FRANK KAMENY: No.

HOST: After fighting in the Battle of the Bulge and returning to the U.S., he finished his physics degree in 1948 – in less than two years. Then on to Harvard for his masters and doctorate, where he measured the brightness of stars with a new photoelectric detector, then on to Northern Ireland for a year as chief assistant to the director of observatory at the Armagh Observatory. Frank's at the University of Arizona on his 29th birthday, researching for his PhD thesis. Meets a man, and they get in a car, drive out into the desert, and spend the night under the full moon. Soon after, he's in San Francisco—

FRANK KAMENY: The trial took place the following morning,

HOST: after his arrest in the public men's room at the East Bay bus terminal.

FRANK KAMENY: I was informed that were I to plead 'not guilty,' I would be required to remain in San Francisco for several days until the case would be disposed of, whereas a plead of 'guilty' would result in a quick disposition of the matter. I already had hard-to-get plane reservations to New York (it was just before Labor Day), I was expected there and elsewhere in the East, and so, for much the same reasons as those for which one might plead 'guilty' to a traffic violation which, technically, one should and would like to fight, I pled 'guilty' here. I was fined \$50 and given six-months probation, the conditions of the probation being satisfied by my mailing in a form on the first day of each month.

HOST: The charge is dropped on **March 12, 1957**, he's told.

FRANK KAMENY: At the end of the period of probation, by provision of California law, and upon proper application by me, the plea and verdict were officially and formally changed, on the record, to 'not guilty: complaint dismissed,' and I received from the State of California a document so stating.

HOST: Working at Georgetown University, he's planning observations of solar eclipses and building a photoelectric photometer. In his spare time, he's learning all the gay spots, from Carroll's on Ninth Street to the Chicken Hut on H and 18th. He's going to parties and trips to Fire Island. But he still wants to go to the moon. **Frank Kameny** applies for a job with the U.S. government. The Army Map Service. He writes on the application:

FRANK KAMENY: Disorderly Conduct; San Francisco; Not Guilty; Charge Dismissed

HOST: He's hired and sent on assignment in October 1957 to Hawaii to improve the military's maps, putting his astronomical studies to good use, and taking steps toward his dream.

AUDIO: typewriter

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL: U.S. Civil Service Commission. Franklin Kameny, it is necessary that you return at once to the Army Map Service in connection with certain administrative requirements within 48 hours. We hope that the interruption of your work will be only temporary.