

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

VIRGINIA APUZZO

educator, professor, activist

“Seeing so many young people being so relaxed in their sexuality, so free to express their right to be who they are—I celebrate that enthusiastically!”



Courtesy of LHA Photo files, Bettye Lane collection

Background Information

Born June 26, 1941

Virginia Apuzzo attended State University of New York at New Paltz, graduating in 1963. Apuzzo also received her masters and doctorate in Urban Education. She became a teacher and worked at a convent. She later became a professor at Brooklyn College and City University of New York until 1986.¹

Apuzzo’s Resistance

Apuzzo knew she was a lesbian by age ten. She grew up Catholic and was even a nun at one point. During her time, the Catholic was very conservative and did not condone same-sex relationships. She was not open about her

sexuality when she was a nun. She became increasingly frustrated with how the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) community was treated by America. For example, same-sex relations were illegal in New York during her time. This led her to quit the convent two days after the Stonewall Riots (the Stonewall Riots were a series of protests June 1969 against police brutality toward the LGBTQ+ community).² Inspired by the bravery of others during the riots, Apuzzo devoted her life to activism for LGBTQ+ people in political and academic spaces. She was the first executive director for the National LGBTQ Task Force, and one of the first openly gay delegates in the Democratic Party. She also started an AIDS-information telephone hotline which educated and provided services to people during the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s. In 1997, Apuzzo was assistant to the president for management and administration. With this role, she was the most senior, openly gay member of President Clinton’s administration.³

Achievements

Apuzzo continues to be a leading LGBTQ+ civil rights lecturer. She is regarded as a leading LGBTQ+ and AIDS activist.⁴ She advocated for all and continues to fight for equality through her everyday resistance.

¹ Items From the Archives: A Rare Childhood Photo of Activist Virginia Apuzzo. (1970, November 11). Retrieved from <https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/news/photo-of-activist-virginia-apuzzo>.

² History.com Editors. “Stonewall Riots.” History.com. A&E Television Networks, May 31, 2017. <https://www.history.com/topics/gay-rights/the-stonewall-riots>.

³ Forum, E. (2016, October 3). Meet LGBT History Month icons Virginia Apuzzo, Josephine Baker, and Xavier Bettel. Retrieved from <https://sdgln.com/causes/2016/10/03/meet-lgbt-history-month-icons-virginia-apuzzo-josephine-baker-and-xavier-bettel>.

⁴ Gessen, M. (2019, June 28). Coming Out, and Rising Up, in the Fifty Years After Stonewall. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/essay/coming-out-and-rising-up-in-the-fifty-years-after-stonewall>.

