



The Task Force in the News

Media Highlights

June 12 – June 29, 2006

Roberta Sklar, Director of Communications

Quote of the Week:

"For more than 30 years, Eric was our movement's visionary. He pushed us to be better, to never lose sight of what our movement for liberation is all about, and to love each other, fight for each other and celebrate our community."

– Matt Foreman, executive director, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
San Francisco Chronicle
June 28, 2006

Eric Rofes, 1954–2006

1. **Eric Rofes, Commentator on Gay Issues, Dies at 51**
New York Times June 29, 2006
2. **Eric Rofes — scholar, educator, gay men's health activist**
San Francisco Chronicle June 28, 2006
3. **Activists mourn passing of Eric Rofes**
The Empty Closet (Gay Alliance of Genesee Valley) June 28, 2006

Pride

4. **As gay pride hits stride, transgendered find more acceptance**
Associated Press (also USA Today) June 24, 2006
5. **Make-or-break time for gay community**
San Francisco Chronicle June 24, 2006
6. **Bay Area residents ready for S.F. gay pride parade, festival**
InsideBayArea.com June 25, 2006

Federal Marriage Amendment

7. **Gays want more from Dems on marriage; Proposed same-sex bans seen as test**
San Francisco Chronicle June 13, 2006
8. **500 Rally For Marriage in the Rain**
Gay City News June 8 - 14, 2006

Faith

9. **The left finds its voice**
Minneapolis Star-Tribune June 17, 2006
10. **Pro-Abortion, Gay Rights Groups Join to Rank States on Abortion**
LifeNews.com June 1, 2006
11. **New Mexico Has Gay Pride**
New West June 12, 2006

Other highlights

12. **Asian American LGBT Survey**
Hyphen June 28, 2006
13. **Being Gay and Bicultural**
Miami Herald June 13, 2006
14. **Florida's Top 100 Events (includes Winter Party)**
BizBashFla June/July 2006
15. **SHe Said**
PrideSource June 15, 2006
16. **SF supes condemn violence in Moscow**
Bay Area Reporter June 15, 2006
17. **Crowds respond to Aviance assault**
Gay City News June 22, 2006
18. **Leather, Laughter under the Sun**
Gay City News June 22, 2006
19. **Gay couple starts tax-protest effort**
PlanetOut.com June 23, 2006
20. **The Informed Meetings Exchange (INMEX) launches with the support of over 100 organizations**
Business Wire June 28, 2006

The New York Times

Eric Rofes, Commentator on Gay Issues, Dies at 51

By DOUGLAS MARTIN

Published: June 29, 2006

Eric Rofes, an educator, author and organizer whose iconoclastic writings on gay concerns preceded the AIDS epidemic and who then helped define its stages, died on Monday in Provincetown, Mass. He was 51.

The cause was not determined, said Richard Burns, executive director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center in New York.

Dr. Rofes (pronounced RO-fes) founded or led gay organizations in Boston, Los Angeles and San Francisco and was a principal organizer of three national meetings on gay and lesbian issues. He wrote or edited 12 books, some of which provoked sharp debate.

Dr. Rofes became a leading exponent of the view that the AIDS emergency had passed and that gay men should cast aside the crisis mentality of the 1980's. What he called his "reconceptualization of AIDS" included not only tolerance for promiscuous gay sex, but also cautious approval.

"We value the enactment of our desires and will not always give them up in a grand gesture of sacrifice to the AIDS epidemic," he wrote in his book "Dry Bones Breathe: Gay Men Creating Post-AIDS Identities and Cultures" (1998).

He defended unprotected sex as, at least, unavoidable.

Larry Kramer, Gabriel Rotello, Michelangelo Signorile and other prominent gay writers criticized such views as dangerously irresponsible, even with a decline in AIDS cases.

Dr. Rofes's outspokenness extended to comparing gay men in the time of AIDS to survivors of Nazi death camps. He wrote what may have been the first book on gay people and suicide, and he strongly criticized AIDS service organizations and anti-AIDS activists for what he saw as dogmatism and fostering a culture of terror.

When testifying to the National Commission on AIDS in San Francisco in 1991, he wore leather chaps, vest and gloves to suggest that sexual expression took many forms.

Eric Edward Rofes was born on Aug. 31, 1954, in Brooklyn. He grew up in Commack on Long Island. Dr. Rofes graduated from Harvard in 1976.



Eric Rofes last year.

In the 70's, he was one of the so-called "Boston Mafia" who founded the Gay Community News and the Boston Lesbian and Gay Political Alliance. In an article he wrote last year for *White Crane*, a quarterly intended for gay men, he told of his joy in joining the emerging gay culture.

"Gay was good," he wrote. "Gay was very good. Gay was excellent."

In that period, he taught sixth grade in public school until he was fired for being openly gay. He then taught for five years at the Fayerweather Street School in Cambridge, Mass. He and his students published three books on young adults' perspectives, including *"The Kids' Book of Divorce: By, for and About Kids"* (1981).

In 1985, he was hired as executive director of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center. After moving to San Francisco in 1989, he headed the Shanti Project, an AIDS service group.

Dr. Rofes received his master's from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1995 and his doctorate in 1998. He had taught at Humboldt State University in Arcata, Calif., since 1999.

His research subjects included charter schools and schoolyard bullies, and he consistently used his own experience and research to document the changes in gay culture from the time before AIDS to the disease's epidemic proportions to what is happening now.

"Dr. Rofes's contribution is unique in the continuity it provides with the political movements of the late 1970's, before the derailment that occurred in the early 1980's as a result of AIDS," *The Gay Community News* wrote in 1996.

Dr. Rofes brought detailed descriptions of his own experiences, including explicitly sexual ones, to his work, as well as stark emotions.

The Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review, in reviewing *"Dry Bones"* in 1999, suggested that it "is at root not about AIDS at all, but about what AIDS took away from him and his generation, what it left him with, and what he's doing with his anger about the theft."

Surviving are his partner of 16 years, Crispin Hollings of San Francisco; a brother, Peter, of Milwaukee; and a sister, Paula Casey-Rofes.

Mr. Rofes, who lived in the heart of San Francisco's Castro neighborhood, had since 1998 been building a gay men's health movement that expanded beyond HIV and AIDS. He organized conferences and summits that have led new health agencies to form in cities across the country and internationally.

Chris Bartlett, a Philadelphia activist who led the recent health movement with Mr. Rofes, valued his drive to plan 20 years ahead "instead of having a crisis mentality and reacting to the crisis of the day."

Mr. Rofes bristled at the idea of responding to the AIDS epidemic by dismantling the gay sex culture that blossomed in the 1970s, said Richard Burns, a close friend and executive director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center of New York City.

"Eric fought against that, and remained someone who celebrated our sexual freedom, our sexual autonomy and the strong, loving community that could be built around our sexuality," Burns said.

He started a controversy when he began speaking of the trauma HIV-negative men like himself experienced because of AIDS.

"When Eric would do an analysis of the gay community or the HIV community, he didn't do it to be popular," Burns said. "He did it to find what he saw as the truth and to look for a path for us as a community to follow in order to build a healthy, loving gay community."

He believed gays and lesbians should not put enjoyment of life on hold during their struggle for rights.

"Eric always said the point of the gay liberation movement is to reject this idea and to have pleasure and sex and social justice be a core part of these struggles," said Benjamin Shepard, a New York City activist and a friend of Rofes.

Mr. Rofes grew up on the north shore of Long Island and graduated from Harvard College in 1976. He and three friends he met at the Gay Community News in Boston, the only weekly gay publication in the country at the time, would go on to lead major gay and lesbian advocacy organizations in the country.

He earned a master's degree and a doctorate from UC Berkeley and began teaching at Humboldt State in 1999. Twelve years ago, he began chronicling the lives of gay men throughout the United States in the decade preceding the AIDS epidemic. That is the book he was writing at his death.

Mr. Rofes was preceded in death by his father and a sister. He is survived by his partner of 16 years, Crispin Hollings of San Francisco; his mother, Paula Casey-Rofes of Boynton Beach, Fla.; and his brother, Peter Rofes of Milwaukee.

A Kaddish will be held today in Provincetown, and a memorial is set for 3 p.m. July 15 at the Metropolitan Community Church, 150 Eureka St., San Francisco.

In lieu of flowers, Mr. Rofes' family requests donations be made in his name to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 1325 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C., 20005, or to the Highlander Research and Education Center, 1959 Highlander Way, New Market, Tenn., 37820.